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Elementary Principals' Leadership Practices Towards Response to Intervention (RTI) Implementation: Perceptions of Teachers in Southeastern Georgia

Oatanisha Renee Dawson

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP PRACTICES TOWARDS RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) IMPLEMENTATION: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS IN SOUTHEASTERN GEORGIA

by

OATANISHA RENEE DAWSON

(Under the Direction of Hsiu-Lien Lu)

ABSTRACT

Principals are responsible for overseeing all of the school's programs and initiatives. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a federal initiative that is a multi-tiered approach to high-quality instruction and ongoing monitoring of students' academic and behavioral progress. Although RTI models vary across the U.S., it is the principal who is accountable for students' overall achievement within the building. With teachers as the direct recipients and observers of their leadership practices, principals implement a tiered intervention process under the influence of national and state guidelines although best practices for implementation are limited.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher perceptions of their principals' practices during RTI implementation. A quantitative study, survey responses were analyzed using a statistical analysis program (SPSS) whereby a regression, correlation and ANOVA analysis were conducted. Results support the literature and reveal that principals' leadership practices towards RTI implementation are critical and perceived as favorable among teachers. More specifically, southeastern Georgia principals demonstrate the five leadership practices of *model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, encourage the heart* and *enable others to act* as defined by the literature.

In response to research questions, data analysis revealed three major findings: 1) the frequency of RTI related principal-teacher interactions is a predictor of favorable teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practices during implementation, 2) school counselors and psychologists have the most frequent RTI-related interactions with principals, 3) school counselors are the primary person in charge of RTI implementation in southeastern Georgia schools. Recommendations for practice are that: 1) principals meet with teachers consistently at the minimum rate of every three months to discuss students' progress within the model and 2) for principals and counselors to have ongoing quality exchanges regarding students' progress within the model as well; considering the critical role of counselors as lead coordinator of RTI within participating schools.

This study emphasized principal leadership as the most influential component of successful RTI implementation. The daily demands of the elementary principal presents its own challenges; however, best practices for principal leadership towards RTI implementation can produce positive outcomes and improve students' behavioral and academic goals.

INDEX WORDS: Leadership, Perceived Leadership Practices, Response to Intervention (RTI) Implementation

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OATANISHA RENEE DAWSON

B.S., Armstrong Atlantic State University, 2004

M.Ed., Armstrong Atlantic State University, 2007

Ed.S., Georgia Southern University, 2010

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OATANISHA RENEE DAWSON

Major Professor:	Hsiu-Lien Lu
Committee:	Kymberly Drawdy
	Devon Jensen

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all of my family. First, to my husband Darrell who loves me unequivocally and without question. Your quiet strength is a virtue that is both rare and admired. It was you that kept me balanced and helped me remember my real priorities. I love you.

To my daughters, Bryana and Taliya, who have shown me what it is like to feel my heart beat outside of my chest - twice. I love you more than you will ever know. May you be lifelong learners; may you leave a Godly impression upon the hearts of those you meet; and may you fulfill your pre-ordained purpose.

To my sisters, Ardysha and Charlette, and my brother, Charles, Jr., who would always let me know that they were in my corner and that to finish my research would be *all good*.

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We did it!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Principals are called to implement local, state and national procedures. These procedures have been designed to improve teaching and learning. The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework was a nationwide initiative to aid in this objective. The general purpose of RTI was to assess data on how a student responded to an instructional or behavioral intervention (Hall, 2008). Prior to RTI, schools used the discrepancy model. Unlike the discrepancy model, which used a formula to compare a student's IQ with his/her cognitive ability, RTI used a tiered system of interventions. Tiered interventions began with quality instruction within the general education classroom and, if necessary, increased to a more individualized instructional plan under the umbrella of special education. RTI also provided school districts with a process to collect data, identify, and place students appropriately in special education (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, et al, 2003). With promising outcomes, RTI implementation was encouraged by state and local education agencies (LEA). However, variations in the person responsible for leading RTI, as well as different RTI models, had begun to emerge.

It has been debated whether or not the 'building-level administrator' is responsible for leading RTI implementation within their school (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; GADOE, 2008, p.6; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005). As the school's instructional leader, the principal was responsible for ensuring the integrity of the school's programs, curriculum, supplementary interventions and to model practices that supported daily instructional programs and activities (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Lose, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Similarly, the principal have a key role in the RTI process and is in the best position for leading it

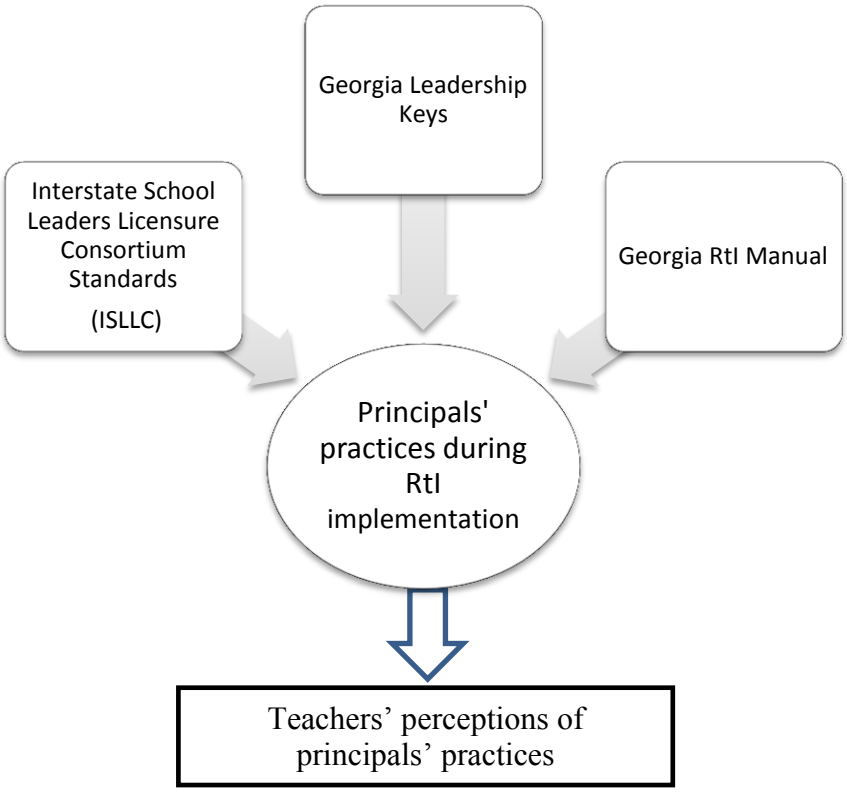
(Kashima, 2009; Lose, 2008; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 2008; White, Polly, & Audette, 2010).

Considered as a set of processes, RTI models differed across the U.S. School districts use of RTI varied in the number of intervention tiers and where students' entry into special education fits into the model (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). Initiated primarily in elementary schools, the goal of RTI is usually to improve reading (Bender & Shores, 2007). In middle or high school, the goal is student mastery of one academic content area (Feuerborn, Sarin, & Tyre, 2011). Some RTI models ranged from having two to seven tiers of intervention. Typical models display three tiers; Georgia, implements a four-tiered model or pyramid of interventions (POI) (Appendix A) (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The first tier within all RTI models begin with generalized instruction used as a universal screener to identify at-risk students. Then, the cycle of progress monitoring of researched-based interventions and fine-tuning intense instruction follows in tiers two and three. In Georgia, after progress monitoring, a referral to special education is made and placement occurs at Tier four. Collectively, each model advocates early intervention as important to student achievement and the use of tiered instruction. On the other hand, no model indicated what specific practices principals should use to achieve their goal of using an RTI model successfully.

It was federally mandated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 that schools use a scientific researched-based process, like RTI, to identify students with a specific learning disability (SLD). However, there were no federal guidelines for principals that recommended best practices or how to maximize implementation. Therefore, principals try to use and sustain RTI to the best of their knowledge. Without federal guidance, principals in Georgia exercise practices that are shaped by national and state school leadership tenets. Therefore, the

following three structures guide principals' implementation of RTI: 1) the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards; 2) Georgia's Leader Keys and; 3) Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions manual (CCSSO, 2008; GADOE RTI, 2008; GADOE, 2011) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Structures that influence principals' practices during RTI implementation



The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards (2008) were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Policy Board on Educational Administration (NPBEA). From this collaboration, the six *Standards for School Leaders* with 31 functions were created (Appendix B) (CCSSO, 2008). The six ISLLC standards are as follows: 1) Sets a widely shared vision for learning, 2) Develops a school culture and instructional program conducive to learning and professional growth, 3) Ensures effective management of the organization for a safe and efficient environment, 4) Collaborates with

faculty and community members to respond to the diversity of needs, 5) Acts with integrity and fairness in an ethical manner, and 6) Understands, responds and influences the political, social, legal and cultural contexts. These national standards were created to help states strengthen their school leadership programs.

Referencing the six ISLLC standards, Georgia's Department of Education (GADOE) created its *Leader Keys*. GADOE's *Leader Keys* has ten strands of required performance for school leadership. The intent of the *Leader Keys* is *to "provide a new focus for leaders as they work to implement practices to improve student learning"* (GADOE, 2011, p.1). Georgia's ten *Leader Keys,* however, is a system that evaluates a leader's skill level "on performance standards" (GADOE, 2011, p.1). Although an evaluative tool, the *Leader Keys* provide a rubric that identifies leadership practices during each stage of school improvement. The *Leader Keys* does not, however, provide a definitive model for principals to use while implementing a new program such as an RTI framework (GADOE, 2011).

The Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions manual lists the role and responsibilities of the 'building-level leadership' (principal) (GADOE RTI, 2008). As schools utilize four tiers of intervention, the principal is to do the following: 1) implement the plan for RTI including the procedures for monitoring how interventions are administered and addressing issues of fidelity, 2) create a school wide focus on assessment driving instruction, 3) develop staff understanding of the RTI process, 4) establish schedules to provide various times for interventions, 5) ensure that Tier 1 standards-based instruction occurs in all classrooms, and 6) establish standard protocols of support for students needing Tier 2 support (GADOE RTI, 2008, p.80). As principals begin to implement an RTI model within their schools, the six ISLLC

Standards for School Leaders, GADOE's ten *Leadership* keys and the Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions are available throughout implementation.

Statement of the Problem

Principal leadership is an essential part of RTI implementation within schools. Also, because RTI is a school-wide reform effort, principals need guidance on how to best coordinate and maintain the model. In Georgia, an RTI manual, along with the six national ISLLC standards and ten state leadership tenets are available for 'building-level administrators' (principals) during implementation; however, best practices for principal leadership are either limited or lacking (CCSSO, 2008; GADOE, 2006; Hilton, 2007; NASDSE, 2006; NJCLD, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore teacher perceptions of principals' practices during RTI implementation. Kovaleski (2007) stated that as the RTI lead implementer and person responsible for fidelity, principals have not been an ongoing topic in school administration publications. It is principals' practices that are critical throughout a school-wide reform effort such as RTI (Hilton, 2007; Lose, 2008; Rodriguez, 2010). Therefore, this study is not an evaluation of principals' leadership skills or professional competency, but to explore what practices are emphasized during RTI implementation that contributes to its success.

RTI is best maintained under the direction of the principal (Hilton, 2007). It is typically the classroom teacher who recommends a student to the RTI core team as needing more intense instruction. It is also the classroom teacher who is responsible for conducting interventions and the progress monitoring of student learning. It is ultimately, however, the principal who communicates with teachers regarding intervention fidelity, student data and the provision of instructional materials. As a result, there are ongoing principal-teacher exchanges and

opportunities for accountability that occur throughout the school day. For that reason, teachers are direct recipients and observers of principals' practices. Research is needed to determine how teachers perceive the relationship between their principals' leadership practice and the state of RTI implementation.

Research Design

To meet the purpose of this study inquiry questions were developed to learn of elementary principals' leadership practices as perceived by teachers during the implementation of an RTI model. The research questions that guided this study are:

1) What is the relationship between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices (PLP) towards RTI implementation?
2) Given that significant relationship is found between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices (PLP), what is the difference in the identified demographic variables?
3) What is the relationship between principal's leadership practices categories and the state of RTI implementation?
4) What is the relationship between itemized principal's leadership practices and the state of RTI implementation as perceived by elementary teachers?

A regression analysis was conducted for the first research question to at best predict how teachers judge principals' practices. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for the second research question to determine where differences in teachers' perceptions of PLP occurred among demographic variables. For the third and fourth research questions a correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between principals' leadership practice and the state of RTI implementation (Table 1).

This study was conducted within elementary schools that are located in southeastern Georgia. Using a modification of an existing survey and researcher-created questions participant responses was collected (Creswell, 2009; deVaus, 2002).

Table 1

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis to Answer Research Questions

Research Question	Data collection	Data Analysis
1. Relationship between demographics and ratings of principals' practices towards implementation?	Survey items 1 – 30 Demographic items 1-10	*Pearson's r-test* *Linear Regression analysis*
2. Varying perceptions of principals' practices by demographics?	Survey items 1 – 30 Demographic items 1-10	*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)*
3. Relationship between five PLP categories and RTI implementation?	Survey items 1 – 30 Six Additional Questions	*Pearson's r-test*
4. Relationship between itemized principals' practices and the state implementation	Survey items 1 – 30 Six Additional Questions	*Pearson's r*-test

Significance of the Study

The researcher will seek to contribute to the published literature on leadership and RTI implementation as well as present results at an academic conference. Nationwide, principals, district level personnel and policymakers will be able to review findings regarding principals' implementation of RTI and give emphasis to practices that contribute to its success. School districts that are in the planning stages of RTI implementation could use findings from this study to enhance principal leadership trainings and/or workshops. Schools that are in the early stages

of an RTI model could use research findings to assess or improve their implementation efforts. More specifically, a more comprehensive professional development or guide to RTI implementation could be designed for Georgia principals using findings from this study.

This study will inform practices of elementary principals of a Title I school what perceived leadership practices are most common during RTI implementation while having restrictions on federal funding (GADOE, 2011*).* "Leaders can learn a lot about themselves and how they come across to others by trying to see their behaviors in light of the task and relationship dimensions. With research, leaders can assess "their actions and determine how they may want to change or improve" (Northouse, 2010, p.78). Results may be used to help determine what, if any, particular practices increase the likelihood of successful RTI implementation as perceived by teachers. District/State level administrators could share with other districts a description of these practices to support RTI or similar school-wide change initiatives. The teaching and learning process would also benefit from this study. As principals learn of best practices to implement and sustain an RTI model, they can better support teachers and hold them accountability regarding administration of and students' response to interventions (McCook, 2007).

Limitations, Delimitations & Assumptions

This study was impacted by the one limitation of time and two delimitations due to the selection of schools and school's choice of personnel to conduct initial RTI implementation. It has been considered that schools vary in degree of RTI implementation as well as differ in how the principal is as the building leader. As a result, to apply findings of this study to other areas of the state or country, during a different time, is limited. It does not preclude the reader from transferring the findings from this study to individual local contexts.

Two major assumptions were considered while conducting this study. To begin, the researcher assumed that participant responses are honest and reported from the best of their recollection. It was also assumed that the results of this study are representative of all the teachers within each school district and within the Southeastern Georgia region regarding their perception of their principals' leadership practices during implementation of an RTI model.

Definition of Terms

Leadership: Leadership is defined as a process used by administrators in order to influence a group of or an individual to achieve a goal (Northouse, 2010).

Principal leadership practice: Principal leadership practices (PLP) are conceived as "*actions and behaviors taken by principals to influence people, processes, and organizational structures*" (Camburn, Spillane, & Sebastian, 2010, p.714; Posner & Kouzes, 1993).

Response to Intervention (RTI): a multi-tiered approach of quality instruction with the utilization of scientifically research-based interventions to identify and address students' academic and behavioral deficits with the fourth tier, as it is in Georgia and North Carolina, being a referral to special education (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009).

RTI Implementation: For the purpose of this study, RTI implementation is referring to the process or procedures used to identify students (by intervention team or teacher), select and administer the interventions (i.e., who will be assigned to the student, materials/resource availability, progress monitor), organize/conduct meetings and provide feedback on student progress (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011).

SUMMARY

The RTI model includes the use of a multi-tiered approach of high-quality, consistent and pervasive monitoring of student progress in both academics and behavior. With limited funding and variation in model emphasis, the common goal of RTI is to provide strategies to effectively meet students' learning and behavioral needs. In order to appropriately serve a student, a systematic approach for identifying the student's need, planning and implementing an intervention to meet that need, and then assessing the progress of that student must be in place (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009).

Different from the discrepancy model, the RTI model provides a research-based framework in order to adequately assess students' academic and behavioral deficits (Moors, Weisenburgh-Snyder, & Robbins, 2010). Now, more state departments of education along with school districts are implementing a tiered-intervention process prior to determining special education eligibility (Martinez & Young, 2011; Yetter, 2010). Principals, as a result, are responsible for RTI implementation with teachers as the primary recipients of their leadership practices. To date, no federal guidelines however, are provided for principals that recommend best practices for RTI implementation. Georgia principals' practices are then guided by national and state leadership tenets in consort with expectations from the Georgia RTI handbook. Guided by these three sources, principals implement RTI to the best of their ability. Therefore, it seems appropriate to investigate teacher perceptions of their principals' practices during RTI implementation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

School leadership "is a phenomenon that is both practiced and experienced" (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008, p.467). With the hierarchical concept of the school's organization noting the principal at the pinnacle, teacher perceptions and expectations of their principal continues to be influenced. Research supports this concept as the building leader directly determines the quality of student programs (Ray, Candoli, & Hack, 2005). This is because, as the instructional leader, it is the principal who is responsible for overseeing all of the school's activities. Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, principals' responsibility includes monitoring struggling learners' response to a research-based intervention (RTI). Growing in implementation, RTI has curbed the use of the discrepancy model in school districts across the nation. Now, embedded within his/her daily tasks, the principal interacts with teachers to ensure fidelity of interventions and the entire RTI process (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). It is during these interactions that principals exercise practices that are a reflection of his/her leadership (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Subsequently, these actions are observed by teachers (Noonan & Walker, 2008). In this chapter, a review of literature on principals' practices are examined and grouped into five categories: leadership, vision, support, motivation and challenger.

Using an online database, literature was searched for between the years of 2005 and 2012. The following keywords were alternated between the search parameters of document title and subject heading: discrepancy model, response to intervention, principal(s) practices, principal leadership, principal role, teacher perceptions, personnel perceptions and RTI implementation. Additionally, although not the focus of this study, the literature outlines the

underpinnings of RTI and the process of tiered interventions. Research on teacher's perceptions of tiered interventions and the overall RTI process are also disclosed in this chapter. Nevertheless, few studies regarding teacher perceptions of principal practices during RTI implementation are known.

Evolution of RTI

The Falling of the Discrepancy Model

It was in 1977, before the adoption of RTI, that students with a specific learning disability (SLD) became a category within special education. The U.S. Department of Education recommended that school districts use the discrepancy model (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster & Saunders, 2010). The discrepancy model would calculate a student's cognitive ability i.e., his/her intelligence quotient (IQ) and compare it with his/her current academic progress to find an inconsistency between the two. This ability versus achievement model was then judged problematic (Wright, 2005). First, the IQ-discrepancy criterion resulted in delaying interventions until student achievement was significantly lower than the actual ability associated with the students' IQ. It was not until the upper grades that students were found to be struggling academically and then identified as having a specific learning disability (SLD) (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster & Saunders, 2010). For many students, by the time the noted discrepancy occurred, remediation was difficult or ineffective (Torgesen, 2000). Next, the discrepancy model was lengthy as well as the fact that it over-identified minorities as needing special services. After that, this model left it indeterminable as to whether ability-achievement discrepancy was due to a learning disability or lack of quality instruction (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011). Therefore, under the discrepancy model, student deficits only increased, and the model took on

the criticism of the "wait-to-fail" model (Moors, Weisenburgh-Snyder, & Robbins, 2010; Restori, Katz, & Lee, 2009).

Since its institution inception, other issues had been found with the discrepancy model. The number of students identified as learning disabled (LD) had grown to be over 200%, causing concern for misdiagnoses and disproportionate minority student enrollments into special education (Berkeley, et al., 2010). There had also been false negatives that did not identify students with low IQs and who were below average academically (Berkeley, et al., 2010). With all of the issues mentioned above, the discrepancy model was abandoned.

The Rising of RTI

Thereafter, RTI was embraced to replace the failing discrepancy model. Although conceived in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, response to intervention was birthed in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. NCLB (2001) focused on measuring students' academic progress including students with disabilities, low socio-economic status and English Language learners. IDEA (2004) does not use the phrase response-to-intervention specifically. In actuality, IDEA (2004) states that *"a local educational agency is to use a process that determines a child's response to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures"* when concluding if a student has a learning disability (p.1). This statement meant that if a student's rate of academic progress falls below state standards, the child could be identified as learning disabled. As a result, NCLB and IDEA were unavoidably connected as each included similar language regarding student achievement.

Accompanying IDEA of 2004 was the expectation of the federal government to share in the expense of conducting this new evaluative process. It was estimated that approximately an

additional expense of 40% would be needed to provide special education services to students that would be identified (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). *Special education* is defined as specially designed instruction to meet the specific learning needs of students with disabilities at no cost to parents or guardians (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). It was also estimated that the federal government would encounter an annual expense of $80 billion on special education and that 60% of students receiving special education services would be grouped under one category, specific learning disability (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). Both the number of students within special education and the cost to provide services for them continued to increase. For these reasons, the federal government continued to support the implementation of a tiered intervention process within schools.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) was deemed a more viable process as it promised to decrease the number of students identified as learning disabled (LD) and prevent struggling learners from failing academically. Prior to RTI, students identified as LD were simultaneously eligible to receive special education services (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). However, the labeling of students as young as five or six was considered premature. Providing students the opportunity to naturally mature and have more instructional experiences was deemed to be more appropriate. Therefore, to meet this goal, all students were to receive high-quality instruction within the general education setting. It is primarily within the general education setting that students with a learning disability are more likely to be successful (Reichrath, Witte, & Winkens, 2010). As teachers delivered frequent and appropriate academic and/or behavioral interventions, the likelihood of student success is increased (Machek & Nelson, 2010; Pavri, 2010) and consequential school failure is prevented (Fletcher& Vaughn, 2009; Rinaldi, Averill & Stuart,

2010). Prior to RTI, discussions about student progress and the modification of interventions would occur in isolation with respect to special education services. With RTI, both general and special education teachers are made equal during the problem-solving process (Sabatino, 2009). RTI is not a "one size fits all" model; but, it is designed to identify and meet students' unique learning needs (Rinaldi, Averill & Stuart, 2010). It is believed that one instructional method, even validated research methods, would not benefit an entire class (Fuchs, 2003). Therefore, decisions are made more frequently regarding instructional changes needed to meet student needs.

Although a research-based process like RTI is federally mandated according to IDEA of 2004, the use of a response to intervention model explicitly is not mandated; neither is there one required model. Currently, there are four known RTI models being used in schools: 1) the problem-solving model, 2) functional assessment model, 3) standard protocol model, and 4) the hybridized or blended models (VanDerHeyden, 2012). The problem solving model involves a school based team that uses the Scientific Model to review student academic progress data, develop interventions and/then re-assess student progress to determine learning deficit (RTI, 2005; VanDerHeyden, 2009). The functional assessment model determines students' baseline progress first, then uses an intervention only to later test its effect on the student such as to determine if there was improvement in academics. Also, within this model, it is easier to replicate specific instructional procedures that are difficult when using the standard protocol model. The repetition of instruction prevents student diagnoses of being learning disabled (VanDerHeyden, 2012). The standard protocol model is determining a student's deficit after reviewing performance data, then matching the student to a specific protocol/intervention. Last,

the blended model is characterized by mixing two or more of the previously defined models. Not only were there differences in models, but also in implementation as well.

In 2009, the degree of RTI implementation varied across the country. At that time, 15 states had adopted an RTI model, 22 were in the development stage, 10 states were guiding districts in implementation and 3 states had no record of implementation (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, Saunders, 2009). Now, all 50 states acknowledge the use of an RTI model. Seven states use RTI as its primary method to identify students with specific learning disabilities. The remaining states use RTI in combination with another identification process (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

Other differences were also evident in RTI models. These differences occurred as a result of some states wanting to be specific about interventions, or wanting emphasis on at what level students are identified as having a learning disability (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Wedl, 2005). For example, Shinn (2007) coined the terms RTI (lowercase) for those schools that emphasize prevention and support, but RTI (uppercase) if used for special education determination. Fuchs, Fuchs and Stecker (2010) categorized schools as IDEA group (i.e., using RTI in the general education setting for prevention of school failure and identification of special education eligibility) or the NCLB group (i.e., supporters of education reform that uses RTI empirically to improve the quality of instruction in the general education setting).

Although variations in RTI models can be seen, they all include common features. Models of RTI share 1) a universal screening process, 2) multiple tiers of scientifically researched interventions, 3) a method for decision-making and problem-solving, and 4) the monitoring and assessment of students' response to individualized instruction (Berkeley, et al., 2009; Hoover & Love, 2011; Rinaldi, et al., 2010; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2010; Wedl, 2005).

As an evidence-based tiered approach, RTI targets students' specific learning deficits through early intervention. Nationally, the use of a tiered model was designed to ensure high-quality instruction, ongoing progress monitoring and assessment, tiered instruction and parent involvement throughout the process (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Hall, 2008). The RTI process uses 1) a universal screener to determine if learning has occurred; 2) the selection and implementation of research-based interventions over a period of time; and 3) the monitoring and deciding if the intervention was successful at each tier level. Georgia, for example, uses a four-tiered problem-solving model. To further illustrate, the following are delineations of the four tiers used in Georgia.

Tier I

At Tier I, the instruction that students receive in the general education classroom targets 80-90% of students. After high-quality general instruction or the teaching and modeling of expected behaviors, common assessments are given to all students periodically. The instruction and assessments serve as universal screeners as all students are given the same assessment and/or held to the same behavioral expectations during the same time. Whether informal or formal, student assessment data is reviewed and compared to the mean of the class, grade level and/or national standards. This comparison provides an academic or behavioral baseline for the class. Students that fall below the mean or do not meet a particular standard are provided with additional classroom instruction or intervention. A classroom intervention could be the classroom teacher re-teaching the material to the entire class or pairing students in a peer-tutoring model. These interventions are viewed as generally effective (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). The supplemental instruction is to take place over a period of six to eight weeks within the general education classroom. The classroom teacher evaluates students' progress after

conducting the intervention to determine the intervention's effectiveness. If the data show little or no academic progress, the student's name is brought before the problem-solving team. The problem-solving team has taken on many names in research i.e., data team, teacher assistance team, behavior support team, intervention team or RTI team (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Kashima, 2009). Nevertheless, in Georgia's Pyramid of Interventions, the school's data team includes the principal grade level/content area representatives, counselors, and school psychologist reviews student progress to address academic or behavioral concerns (GADOE RTI, 2008). The data team then makes a decision to determine the students' need for Tier II intervention; if so, Tier II interventions are then added to Tier I interventions.

Tier II

Tier II students who have been recommended to receive extra interventions, account for 15% - 20% of the class (Torgesen, 2000). Tier II students are students who have shown little or no evidence of academic progress in Tier I and have scored below the 20th percentile on assessments (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Hall, 2008). As a result, they would be identified as needing more comprehensive, frequent and/or intense instruction in a small group. Within a small group setting, students' skill deficits are targeted in addition to the general instruction received each day. The group's size is usually the key difference between Tier I and Tier II and the intensity of instructional opportunities (Baker, Fien & Baker, 2010).

Also, interventions and benchmark goals are set by the school's data-team and continued progress monitoring is documented at Tier II. After goals are set, the classroom teacher, instructional support aid or early intervention personnel administer the extra interventions. Due to the increased intensity of instruction at Tier II, intervention fidelity is closely monitored and the expertise of the individual conducting the intervention should increase as well (Burns &

Gibbons, 2008). When pre-determined benchmarks have been met, Tier II interventions are deemed successful (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). However, for students who continue to show little progress, a recommendation is made for more intense instruction at the tertiary level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Tier III

In Georgia's Pyramid of Interventions, Tier III students have been referred to the school's student support team (SST) after reviewing assessment data (GADOE RTI, 2008). At Tier III, a systematic search and use of intense interventions occurs and progress monitoring is critical (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). A multi-disciplinary team required in Georgia public schools, an SST uses a data-driven process to address students behavioral and academic needs. Data from this and the previous two tiers are collected for an in-depth problem-solving analysis. Tier III in Georgia's Pyramid of Interventions, services and methodologies provided to students are examined to ensure distinct difference from those delivered within the general education classroom (GADOE RTI, 2008). Also, the SST reviews progress monitoring data to determine intervention effectiveness and plan individualized support for the student. Trends in progress monitoring charts and graphs are used to determine if learning has occurred (GADOE RTI, 2008). Data results will either support that interventions are 1) successful, 2) need to be increased at this level or 3) that there is enough evidence to begin the evaluation process for special education. If a student is considered to be evaluated by the school psychologist and found eligible to receive specialized instruction, he/she moves into Tier IV.

Tier IV

In Georgia, students at Tier IV are identified as having a learning or behavioral disability. English Language Learners are also eligible to receive language development and support

services at this tier (GADOE RTI, 2008). Tier IV placement means that individualized comprehensive instructional support will be added to the layers of interventions, within Tiers 1, 2 and 3. These interventions are provided within the general education classroom and/or within a separate setting or both. An individualized education program (IEP) is then designed by specialized support personnel (i.e., special education teachers, general education teacher, school psychologist and counselor) (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; GADOE RTI, 2008). The IEP specifies what constitutes an intervention and the appropriate instruction and/or assessment setting for the student at Tier IV. Throughout the RTI process, nonetheless, the RTI model encourages the use of increasingly intense interventions at each tier before referring a student to special education.

Ultimately, the goal of RTI is to match at each tier, the intensity of the intervention with the academic deficit or problem behavior (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Gresham, 2005). At times, the process of pairing intervention with deficit is complex and contributes to the overall process of RTI implementation to be no easy task (Mellard, McKnight and Jordan, 2010). Nevertheless, it gives students an opportunity for remediation and results in fewer special education referrals (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). The implementation of these four tiers is no easy task. As it is with other innovative programs, RTI needs all stakeholders, especially administrative leadership to see that goals and positive outcomes are met (Dove & Freeley, 2011).

Implementation of RTI

With the unveiling of RTI in an age of increased accountability and performance, the local school principal finds himself/herself in a paradigm shift as he/she interacts with teachers, students and other stakeholders. Additionally, the principal no longer is viewed as the person that only manages the facility, but oversees the business, finances and the instruction of the school (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Ray, Candoli & Hack, 2005). While doing so, core

elements of implementation are to be established to withstand the challenges of initiating and sustaining an RTI model.

Components of implementation. Whether schools use an RTI model as a method to provide early intervention for struggling learners or SLD identification, key elements must exist in order for the model to be effective (Lembke, Garman, Deno & Stecker, 2010). A review of literature supports that there are eight fundamental components of RTI implementation (Table 2). Fuchs (2003) addressed issues related to the timing, criterion and nature of interventions, which

Table 2

Elements of Implementation

1. Support from administrator and staff members
2. Formation of problem-solving team on site
3. Consensus of an evidence-based interventions and intervention assessment (including screening and progress monitoring)
4. Examination of the core academic program currently in place to make sure it is meeting the needs of the majority of students
5. Team analysis of school-wide data and placement of students in tiered instructional groups
6. Identification of interventions for Tiers 2 and 3 and a schedule for implementation of the tiered interventions
7. Determination of how fidelity of treatment for Tiers 1–3 will be assessed
8. Determination of professionals who will monitor the progress of students in Tiers 2 and 3 on a frequent basis, including goal-setting, data collection, data-decision making and changes in instruction

(Lembke, Garman, Deno & Stecker, 2010).

was later supported by Fuchs & Fuchs (2006) in an article on building a school's capacity to maintain RTI. Suggestions for schools to examine its assessment procedures included rules for data-utilization and progress monitoring (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). A school's use of students' performance data to carefully evaluate intervention effectiveness was also encouraged by Burns, Peter, & Noell (2008). Performance feedback would be reviewed by a school's problem-solving team to enhance implementation fidelity. An RTI guide for assisting struggling readers was later issued by the Institute of Educational Science (2009). This included the importance of all the

aforementioned components of RTI. In its guide, the IES proposed five recommendations and corresponding checklists for successful implementation. Though the first recommendation of the IES (2009) is to include the principal when building a problem-solving team and the principal is listed first as a core element in effective implementation (Burns, et al., 2008), no specific RTI practices for principals are noted.

Challenges to implementation. Though the implementation of RTI has helped educators get to know their students better, challenges still exist. Martinez and Young (2011) analyzed school personnel perspectives of the RTI process in southeastern Texas. Using an online survey, 99 general and special education teachers along with administrators and other school personnel responded to survey questions on a five-point Likert scale. Survey items addressed educators' RTI experiences with the initiation process, collection of data, providing interventions and follow-up, and their perception of the process. It was made known that parents were not involved in the RTI process and that progress monitoring and data collection were issues as well. Although viewed as having a positive impact in the school, one common theme appeared within respondent comments, i.e., too much documentation. To improve implementation, researchers suggested that principals collaborate with parents, be attentive to intervention fidelity, and provide adequate support for teachers.

Zola (2011) examined the relationship between principal responsibilities and RTI as perceived by teachers and principals. After surveying nine elementary school principals and their teachers it was the principal, overall, named as the most significant change agent. Although there were no significant differences between teachers and principals' perceptions of Change Order, there was a negative correlation with teachers' perceptions and principals' self-perception of RTI implementation in high poverty schools. While teachers perceived RTI as an extension of the

past and can be implemented with current knowledge (*first-order change*), principals perceived it as a break from the past and needed the acquisition of new knowledge (*second-order change*). Zola encourages principals to be mindful of this potential perception from teachers during implementation.

In another study, Machek and Nelson (2010) explored perceptions of RTI by mailing surveys to members of the National Association of School Psychologists. Five-hundred forty-nine surveys were completed and returned out of the 1,480 that were mailed for a response rate of 37%. Though some benefits to implementation were named in the study such as the early identification and intervention for students and the ruling out of poor instruction, several challenges were disclosed. To begin, school psychologists' perceptions varied on the school's ability to sustain the RTI process in regard to special education teacher's effectiveness. Other challenges were linked to principal leadership such as the number or lack of personnel, the availability of time to conduct interventions and financial resources.

Hall (2008) also named regulated funding as a challenge to RTI implementation. Currently, schools across the nation receive funding from both federal and state allocations. Federal grants however, are to supplement, but not replace monetary support for school programs and/or school districts. Therefore, schools that have a high percentage of students from low-income families receive assistance through Title I federal funds. Title I schools are allowed to use up to 15% of their allotment to support their delivery of RTI interventions for students without a disability or who have not been identified as needing individualized instruction (Sparks, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). With Georgia being excluded, the Southeast Region states have depended primarily on funds from IDEA of 2004 and a variety of national and regional technical assistance resources and experts to support their RTI efforts

(Sawyer, Holland, & Detgen, 2008). This is because an RTI model is not a specialized service or program for students. Therefore, in order to maintain an RTI model with the challenge of restricted funding, principal innovation is manifested in changes in the master schedule or expansion of personnel (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). Nevertheless, more guidance is needed to help principals navigate the waters of RTI implementation.

Principal Leadership

The principal, in good stewardship, supports and oversee all of the school's programs and purposes (Sergiovanni, 2009). Contemporary research has either concentrated on principal leadership being instructionally focused (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) or on principals as organizational managers (Heneman & Milanowski, 2004; Saban & Wolfe, 2009). Previous research regarding principal leadership addresses principals' time, tasks, role and involvement.

Principal's Time

In generic terms, principals are given the same number of hours during the school day as teachers. Compared to teachers who use the majority of their school day providing instruction, a principal's time, however, is allotted very differently. Unlike a teacher, the principal's daily objective is to see that all of the school's goals are met "economically and efficiently" (Ray, Candoli, & Hack, 2005, p.80). Therefore, typically, it is not the principal that is always 'doing', but trying to get others to 'do' (Ray, et al., 2005). Using observational methods, research has shown that each day a principal spends approximately 25% of their time on general administrative duties. Up to 36% of their time is spent with other professional personnel and up to 46% of their time is working with students. Little time, 6%, is spent on instructional or

curricular programs (Peterson, 1977). Whether it is one-on-one or one-with-many, principal leadership is needed to move a school towards a shared vision and productive outcomes.

Principal's Tasks

Based on a range of studies, Camburn, Spillane, and Sebastian (2010) found that principal practices include an exhaustive number of tasks. These tasks were grouped into five general areas: school management, instructional leadership, planning and setting goals, boundary spanning, and personal development. First, there is school management that is the most fundamental responsibility of the principal (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). The purpose of school management is to support teaching and learning through management of students, staff and the building. As the principal manages the school, he/she creates an environment that affects the school's culture, quality of instruction and student achievement. Also, as manager, the principal models desired behaviors and expectations as he/she interacts with teachers addressing instructional goals and the development of school policy (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Then, there is principal's instructional leadership. As the instructional leader, principals empower teachers by providing professional development opportunities and times of collaboration (Leithwood & Mcadie, 2007; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Principals also monitor classroom instruction and coordinate the curriculum. Next, goal-setting by principals help shapes the school's vision as planning for the future takes place. As principals engage in planning and communicating long-term goals, these efforts are known to have the most impact on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). After that, there is the principals' communication with stakeholders that is termed as boundary spanning. Boundary spanning serves the dual purpose of acquiring resources for the school as well as safeguards the school from outside persuasion (Camburn, et al., 2010). Lastly, principals must

be cognizant of their own need for personal development. Principals conduct numerous tasks throughout the school day. Therefore, to be successful in leadership, principals must continuously develop their own knowledge, skills and capacity to manage professional learning (Leithwood & Mcadie, 2007; Peterson & Kelly, 2002). As the school's leader, it is the principal who, as a good steward, is to support and oversee all of its purposes (Sergiovanni, 2009).

Principal's Role

Jorgensen, Walsh, and Niesche (2009) evaluated the perceived role of leadership during the implementation of a new school program in Australia. As a case study, the Australian primary school implemented a new curriculum model entitled New Basics. Very different from modern curriculum, New Basics altered teacher pedagogy and assessment. New Basics grouped learning into four divisions: 1) life and social; 2) multi-literacies and media; 3) citizenship; and, 4) environments and technologies.

An ethnographic study, researchers examined New Basics by taking field notes after having participated in school events for over a two-year period. A 'Likert-type' survey, having 1-strongly agree to 5-strongly disagree, and an open-ended questionnaire were used to collect data from all 34 teachers. Researchers found that the leadership's role was essential in the reform process. The role of leadership during program implementation is not to fall back on prior experiences and become program manager, but to motivate others as the reform leader (Jorgensen, Walsh & Niesche, 2009). Taken from teacher responses and written comments on the survey, researchers found that teachers agreed with survey questions pertaining to administrator's strengths, collaborative efforts and ongoing support as contributing factors to successful implementation. Teachers also clearly identified that actions of the leadership such as recognizing teachers as professionals, giving significance to teacher suggestions, and providing

opportunities for teacher leadership during meetings positively impacted the implementation of the New Basics program (Jorgensen, et al., 2009). Though implemented without the assistance of federal funding, the program resulted in student achievement. The leader's role during this initiative regarding the use of New Basics was determined successful.

Principal's Involvement

Conducted within eight Texas high schools, researchers Gerhart, Harris, and Mixon (2011) investigated the principals' success. The principals were considered successful as their schools achieved a high rating on the state's standardized assessment for two out of the three years it was administered. These high schools were selected for the study as they had Hispanic students that made up at least 30% of their population. Also, because in Texas, Hispanic students (18.3%), which were more than any other ethnic group i.e., Black students (4.8%) and White students (9.9%), would often drop-out of high school.

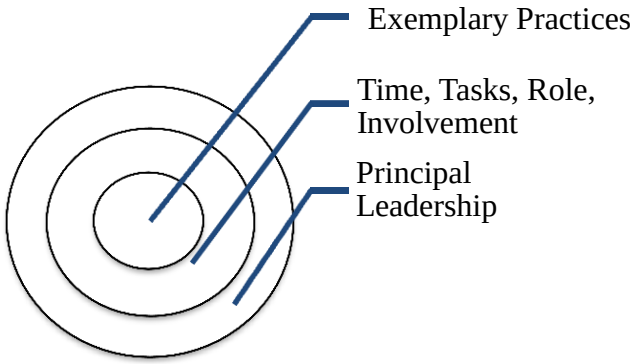
Gerhart, Harris, and Mixon (2011) established that common practices emerged among principals. Principals supported the academic success of all students. Principals demonstrated that they had high expectations for students and provided resources and materials to support staff members. Principals would also intentionally pair students with teachers if student progress was slow or had flat-lined. The schools also conducted public acknowledgment of students' academic progress via parties or celebrations. One other practice shared by the eight principals was the building of relationships that included professional development for teachers that focused on poverty and language.

These varying domains of time, task, role and responsibility share what principals' practices that contributed to school success were exercised. Still, limited in scope were detailed practices used by principals specific to RTI implementation.

Five Exemplary Practices

Principal leadership practices (PLP) are the actions of principals used "to influence people, processes, and organizational structures" (Camburn, et al., 2010, p.714). Principal leadership however, is complex just as other areas of human behavior. At times, leadership is incremental or segmented but, most effectively leadership is comprehensive (Hoy & Tarter, 2008). The practices that principals employ are central to all aspects of leadership such as time, task, role and involvement, as he/she oversees the school's activities and common goals (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Exemplary practices central to principal leadership.



Principals' leadership practices provide direction as well as influence teachers and the level of success a school has while working towards their goal (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). As principals demonstrate their personal leadership practices throughout the school day, regular principal-teacher interactions occur. During these exchanges, teachers have an opportunity to interact with the principal, experience the principals' behavior and develop a perception of the leadership practices that he/she models.

Exemplary practices of principal leadership and their association to RTI implementation were analyzed and the following five categories were formed: direction, vision, challenge, support, and motivate.

1) Direction

At the very beginning of a project, the leader is to share with subordinates clear instructions about the goal of the project. From the outset, the leader's behaviors should exemplify the expectations of the project's goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). At the initial stages of RTI implementation, this may also be at the start of the new school year it is to be shared with teachers that RTI practices are important as the school attempts to provide instruction for all students within the general education setting.

As the instructional leader, the principal initiates and facilitates RTI implementation within the school in a number of ways (Bender & Shores, 2007). They monitor classroom instruction and coordinate the curriculum. Throughout implementation, the principal conducts classroom walkthroughs, arrange meeting times to review progress monitoring data and have a variety of informal and ongoing discussions with teachers about students' progress (Kashima, et al., 2009; Reutebuch, 2008; Torgesen, 2007).

In 2009, Spiegel explored the perceptions of staff members regarding their principals' characteristics as they led RTI implementation in their schools. After interviewing three principals and nine certified personnel, common themes emerged. Researchers concluded that the following were factors relating to its implementation success and made recommendations to soon-to-be practitioners of RTI: 1) the principals' participation is critical in the RTI process including his/her communication and interaction with staff demonstrated his/her interest in the process and helped teachers be reflective; 2) the principal's support given to teachers and

demonstrated by the principal through recruitment of expertise and listening to teachers; 3) the principal providing free time and resources; and 4) the principals' use of data to influence decisions.

In Lembke, Garman, Deno and Stecker's (2010) study on one school's progress over a four-year period, administrator participation in the implementation of RTI is referenced throughout the study. In listing its 'keys to success', researchers detailed the following four elements: 1) commitment of administrator and staff, 2) the use of screening and progress monitoring, 3) attention to interventions and 4) staff collaboration. Utilizing these four elements, the studied elementary school was no longer named a school at-risk but, became a model school in meeting student needs. Lembke, et al., (2010) urged potential RTI practitioners that administrator leadership and commitment is the most critical element to implementation success.

2) Vision

A clear and inspirational vision from the principal gives teachers direction for a new program. As the leader shares hopeful outcomes for the duration of the new program implementation, the leader is also able to listen to members' concerns and suggestions. This open communication may result in revising or restructuring practices in order to meet the program's goal (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Goal-setting by principals help shape the school's vision as planning for the future takes place. As principals engage in planning and communicating long-term goals, these efforts are known to have the most impact on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). In regards to RTI, the leader is to be able share with teachers how their behaviors, both individually and collectively, will positively impact student achievement. The principal's vision could be illustrated by using stories of success from surrounding schools or from student successes within their own building.

3) Challenge

Exemplary leaders are willing to take risks and explore the unknown regarding new projects (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Experimenting with new ideas and inquiring about current practices in order to improve the process is not unfamiliar to some leaders. Within the RTI process, because of its ambiguity in implementation, leaders will create their own method of execution within their school. At times, this method of execution will not be similar to those of other schools even within the very same district. Therefore, leaders will step into the unknown and even take risks. For example, the principals' communication with stakeholders is viewed as risk-taking or boundary spanning (Camburn, et al., 2010). As principals network to acquire resources for the school, he/she must simultaneously protect the school from outside persuasion.

4) Support

Principals empower teachers by providing professional development opportunities and times of collaboration (Leithwood & Mcadie, 2007; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In 2009, Nunn and Jantz examined teacher's perception of their skillfulness in executing their role within the process after receiving RTI training. One-day trainings were held five times over the course of one year. Using the Teacher Efficacy Beliefs and Behavior Scale (TEBBS), 429 trained RTI educators from K to 12th grade were administered the survey. Analyzing teachers' self-efficacy as it relates to their RTI involvement and implementation of interventions, it was found that teachers reported higher levels of efficacy after training and implementation. The more training teachers receive, the more they will see positive tangible outcomes from their contribution to the RTI process. As a result, the more likely they are to implement interventions with fidelity and continuously progress monitor. RTI training is not only necessary but also, should be arranged by the principal to encourage fidelity of the process (Hall, 2008).

Goodman and Webb (2006) conducted an ethnographic study on RTI training and reported their findings. Contrary to the purpose of RTI, data revealed that many teachers are "disenchanted with the referral process" as they employ interventions that are invalid and provide very little follow-up (Goodman & Webb, 2006, p.67). It was recommended in the research that teachers needed appropriate training. RTI training should be "well-researched, empirically validated identification procedures and intervention strategies if RTI is to be effective in reaching its two primary objectives" (Goodman & Webb, 2006, p.67). Once teachers are equipped with effective processes and methodologies, they become more effective as classroom teachers in general (Nunn, Jantz, & Butikofer, 2009).

The need for professional learning was also revealed in a study by McCombes-Tolis and Spear-Swerling (2011). Research findings strongly indicated how administrators' roles for the successful implementation of RTI are critical even from the initial stages of hiring and interviewing teachers. It is during the hiring and interviewing process that principals learn of teachers' depth of content knowledge and experience with recording and analyzing data. Teachers' pedagogical knowledge of a subject area and reading and interpreting data results from assessments used within RTI process is crucial to the effectiveness of the process. In effect, the results indicated that school administrators are responsible for offering professional development or coaching to teachers to ensure teacher understanding about the execution of interventions and interpretation of assessment for the RTI process (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011).

Principals must also be cognizant of their own need for personal development. They should continuously develop their own knowledge, skills and capacity to manage through professional learning (Leithwood & Mcadie, 2007; Peterson & Kelly, 2002). As principals and teachers engage in professional discussions, principal's knowledge of current instructional

strategies and resources is important as it contributes to the success of the team or project (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The leader is also able to support members' suggestions or would be able to move program efforts forward using both the advice from members and current professional development. Ongoing professional discussions also build a sense of community so that teachers are then more likely to trust their colleagues and are open to new ideas (Walhstrom & Louis, 2008). An exemplary leader practices the sharing of and listening to ideas along with learning of various perspectives about program initiatives and efforts (Kouzes & Posner). As rich discussions occur between the principal and teachers, the principal learns of teacher ideas regarding their role, school goals and student progress within the RTI process.

5) Motivate

School leaders, in this case principals, reward or recognize member behaviors that have helped the program's initiative within the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Members are praised openly or are recipients of acts of appreciation for their cooperation or role in the program. Within the RTI process, teachers are praised for their providing interventions to students or sharing of information with colleagues on the RTI team. These acts of collaboration have the potential to be noted and rewarded openly by the principal or principal's designee. Although it may be difficult to openly praise teachers individually for their efforts due to time and structural constraints, nevertheless, effective principals find other ways to do so. These times of praise demonstrates that principals are supportive of and attentive to the successes made by teachers. Public support and recognition of teachers also emphasizes to others desired or expected performance. Tarter, Bliss, and Hoy (1989) noted that supportive principal behavior is directly associated with high levels of engaged teachers.

Behaviors or actions taken by the principal during principal-teacher exchanges are a reflection of his/her leadership and subsequently observed by teachers (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Noonan & Walker, 2008). Teachers then give meaning to the behaviors thereby forming a perception of the principals' practices. Perceived leadership is defined as the practices modeled by leaders as observed by followers (Robbins & Judge, 2007). What is to be considered, however, is that an individual's perception can be very different from reality. Pertaining to teachers' perception of principals, there are variables that influence what a teacher perceives. First, there are external factors that are beyond the principal's control such as family, community and personal experiences that influence a teacher's perception of their principal's leadership practices. Perceptions are also formed based upon the disposition of a person, the type of situation, or other contrived point of views (Hitt, Miller, & Colella , 2009). Then, there are other factors that a principal have direct control over and that is his/her own actions. Continued supportive behavior from the principal will ultimately impact teachers' perception of their principals' leadership (Walhstrom & Louis, 2008).

Though difficult to identify the effect of good leadership, it is very easy to see when leadership is not present (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The absence or lack of effective leadership should not occur as principals try to coordinate and sustain an intervention model such as RTI. What should be present is direction from upper level administration providing adequate guidelines and support. However, national and state guidelines for principal leadership during RTI implementation are limited.

Guidelines for Principal Leadership

To aid principals in their role as the building leader and guide their professional practices, national and state guidelines were designed. Although the effectiveness of the entire RTI process

includes the participation of the principal as critical, few studies have explored this aspect (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Hall, 2008). A review of literature on this topic indicates that there are principal practices that contribute to teachers' perception of RTI implementation. Following are explanations of the national and state guidelines for principal leadership followed by the benefits and barriers to principal leadership during RTI implementation.

National principal practices and RTI

Issued by the National Policy Board of Education Administration (NPBEA), the six Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards have become more prominent and influential in efforts to develop the practice of educational administrators, particularly principals (Brumley, 2010). As principals lead their schools in instructional activities, including RTI implementation, they are to do so within the guidelines of the six ISLLC standards. A description of the six ISLLC standards and their association with RTI are outlined below.

ISLLC standard one calls for principals to have a vision for learning (ISLLC, 2008). This vision is to be shared and supported within the school and to community stakeholders. As the lead implementer of RTI, the school's principal is to constantly communicate the value of using the RTI process and its promising outcomes (Hall, 2008).

ISLLC standard two calls for principals to develop a school culture and an instructional program that promotes student learning and professional development (PD) of staff members (ISLLC, 2008). As principals promote PD opportunities for teachers and staff, student learning improves (Brumley, 2010). Since the implementation of RTI is challenging, a plan to increase teacher and staff knowledge of the process must be in place (Hall, 2008). Professional development on RTI could be organized where an overview of the process is shared with

teachers or in-depth content specific strands of RTI PD could be offered (Hall, 2008).

ISLLC standard three calls for principals to effectively manage the school's operations and resources to ensure a safe and efficient learning environment (ISLLC, 2008). As the organizational leader, the principal is to identify those structures that are hindering the learning process. Within the context of RTI, the principal is able to select members for the RTI committee, reassign staff to conduct interventions, allocate time within the master schedule to conduct interventions and decide on what assessment instruments are to be used throughout the process (Hall, 2008).

ISLLC standard four calls for principals to collaborate with stakeholders, address the diversity of needs, and mobilize community resources (ISLLC, 2008). Principals are to engage all stakeholders in a collaborative effort to increase academic and behavioral progress. As the principal works along with parents, business leaders, and community members in concerted effort during meaningful interactions, the outcome is an effective learning community (Brumley, 2010). Within the RTI framework, a principal may select an RTI coordinator and a content specific RTI coach to ensure the model's success. These two roles could share the responsibility of acknowledging teachers and students' progress within the RTI process. When stories of early success are publicized, teachers and community members are more inclined to join the school's RTI efforts (Hall, 2008).

ISLLC standard five calls for principals to act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (ISLLC, 2008). Throughout the principal's daily interactions during the school day, he/she is to behave in an ethical manner. Often time, subordinates view their leader as a person of integrity. Kouzes (1998) stated that principals' credibility is linked to what he/she communicates, both verbally and by practice. During RTI implementation, the principal is to ask

critical questions about the process and the progress of interventions. The principal is to also be both deliberate and honest about decisions regarding addressing student needs (Hall, 2008).

ISLLC standard six calls for principals to understand and respond to political, legal and cultural contexts (ISLLC, 2008). When the principal learns of the student deficits within the student body, he/she should promote their educational need to policymakers and community leaders. As the school's advocate, the principal has the responsibility to ensure that all students have a quality education. If student needs are not made known, the help they receive will be restricted to only what the school/district can provide. RTI success is dependent upon all levels within the local school and the federal government.

Georgia's principal practices and RTI

As Georgia's principals lead their schools in improving the teaching and learning process, they incorporate the Leader Keys as a guide. The purpose of the Leader Keys is to give direction to administrators, in this case principals, during their efforts to increase the learning of all students (GADOE, 2011). GADOE's Leader Keys has ten strands of required performance for school leadership. The 10 strands are in the areas of: Curriculum, Assessment, Standards-Based Instruction, Data Analysis, Organizational Culture, Professional Learning and Development, Performance Management and Process Improvement, Managing Operations, Leading Change, and Relationship Development.

Aligned with the ISLLC standards of leadership, Georgia Leader Keys provide a rubric that identifies leadership practices during each stage of improvement. Used as an evaluation instrument, the Georgia Leader Keys provides both formative and summative observation data to identify a principal's level of performance on each standard (GADOE, 2011). Georgia's Leader Keys do not provide a definitive model for principals to use while implementing a school-wide

initiative such as RTI (GADOE, 2011). Georgia does, however, provide a manual that gives some guidance to principals throughout RTI implementation.

Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions implementation manual lists the role and responsibilities of the 'building-level leadership' (principal) (GADOE RTI, 2008). During implementation, the principal is to: 1) implement the plan for RTI implementation including the plan for monitoring implementation of the interventions and addressing issues of fidelity; 2) create a school wide focus on assessment driving instruction; 3) develop staff understanding of the RTI process; 4) establish schedules to provide various times for interventions; 5) ensure Tier 1 standards based instruction occurs in all classrooms; and 6) establish standard protocols of support for students needing Tier 2 support (GADOE RTI, 2008, p. 80). As principals begin to implement an RTI model within their schools, the six ISLLC Standards for School Leaders, GADOE's ten Leadership keys and the Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions manual are available to them. Yet, there is still much debate about the aspect of principal leadership during RTI implementation.

SUMMARY

By and large, principal leadership influences all aspects of RTI planning and implementation (White, et al., 2012). Exemplary practices are central to principal leadership and influence the level of success a school has while working towards their goal (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Since RTI implementation is a school-wide reform effort, RTI manuals for implementation and principals' performance standards are available to 'building-level administrators' (principals) to ensure knowledge, support and use of best practices (CCSSO, 2008; GADOE, 2006; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006; NJCLD, 2005; Hilton, 2007). However, none are specific to principal implementation of RTI. Considering the components of and the challenges to implementation, principals' should examine the necessary practices that promote RTI and fidelity of the process (Kashima, 2009; Kovaleski, 2007). Although there is not a 'right' or a 'wrong' RTI model; the wrongness can only be found in the quality of its overall implementation (VanDerHeyden, 2012). It is the school leadership that plays an important part in student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Kashima, 2009). Therefore, to promote successful and progressive implementation of RTI in schools, a contribution to research is needed to examine which practices principals emphasized during the implementation process.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter are the procedures to be followed in response to the inquiry questions that guide this study. This chapter begins with the provocations for research, a restatement of the research questions and the study's significance. Next, the research design gives the study's population, instrument selection and its association to RTI implementation and structural influences in the literature review. Then, data collection and analysis for each research question are delineated. Limitations and assumptions are discussed at the end of the chapter.

Principals' practices during RTI implementation are critical to the program's success (Kashima, 2009). Principals are encouraged to explore practices that contribute to promoting and sustaining the RTI model. Without principal leadership, the success of the initiative is unlikely (Hall, 2008; NASDSE, 2008). In Georgia, there are three structures that guide PLP during implementation of RTI. These structures do not however, provide best practices for principals to lead the initiative. Additionally, there are few studies that explore PLP specific to RTI implementation.

Principals are responsible for overseeing all of the school's programs and activities. This responsibility includes leading the implementation of an RTI model. Since general education teachers are the primary conductors of interventions, they usually initiate the RTI referral process as well as administer secondary and/or tertiary interventions as prescribed by the decision-making team. As a result, teachers are the direct recipients and observers of the principal's leadership practices that are demonstrated during daily RTI principal-teacher interactions. The purpose of this study is to: 1) To determine how southeastern Georgia elementary teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership practices in regards to RTI implementation vary

according to demographics; 2) To determine which of the five leadership practices categories are associated with implementation; and 3) To determine which of the thirty leadership practices are associated with RTI implementation,

Significance of the Study

This study will seek to contribute to the literature on leadership and a more comprehensive professional development for principals regarding leadership practices during RTI implementation. State assessments and implementation manuals indicate expectations for student learning and behavioral outcomes. As state and local education agencies refine their RTI manuals, much attention will be given to the organization of tiered interventions because student learning occurs within tiered instruction (Mellard, McKnight, & Jordan, 2010). Principals will need to know what practices contribute to the organization and maintaining of these tiers and academic gains. Schools that are already in the implementation stages of RTI could use research findings to assess or improve their implementation efforts. School districts that are in the planning stages of RTI implementation could use findings from this study to enhance principal leadership trainings and/or workshops.

Also, RTI implementation is prevalent in Title I elementary schools. This study will inform elementary principals of Title I schools what perceived leadership practices are most common and successful during RTI implementation while having specific spending guidelines that accompany federal funding (GADOE, 2011, p.72). Results may be used to help determine what, if any, particular practices increase the likelihood of successful RTI implementation. District/State level administrators could share with other districts a description of these practices to support this school-wide change initiative.

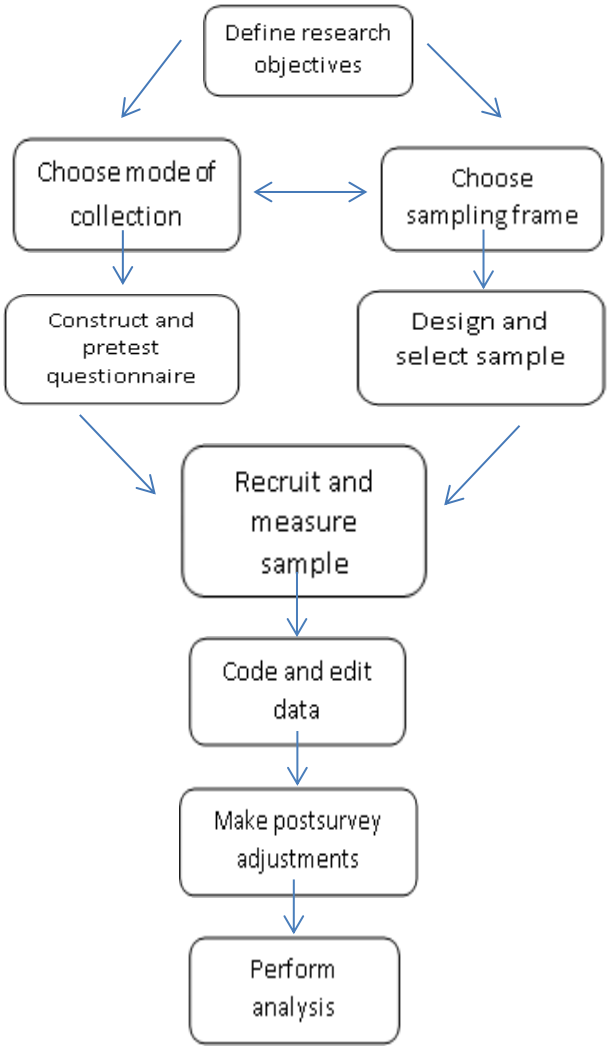
Research Design

Throughout RTI implementation, teachers are the primary providers of classroom interventions and the direct recipients of principals' leadership practices (Moore & Whitfield, 2009). Therefore, teachers' perspective is key (Martinez & Young, 2011; Stecker, 2007; Yetter, 2012). This quantitative study used a predetermined survey on exemplary leadership practices and researcher-created questions to examine teachers' perception of RTI implementation. A survey methodology was used as it is best suited in collecting data that may otherwise be difficult to quantify using observational methods and to measure a large number of participants' perspectives (deVaus, 2002; Glasow, 2005). Considering the literature regarding principal leadership practices during RTI implementation, both the sample and the instrument were derived (Groves', et al., 2009).

The procedures used to develop the survey and to collect data collection follows Groves' perspective on using a survey as a process (Groves, et al., 2009) (see Figure 3). In keeping with Groves, et al., (2009) perspective, this study's objectives for research were determined prior to the selection of data collection and the sample. After a review of literature, the design of the research and instrument was determined. An invitation to participate in the survey research was distributed. Participant responses were collected, archived, and then prepared for data analysis.

To increase the participation rate, a telephone follow-up was made to Superintendent's to ensure receipt of email one week after the initial distribution. A telephone follow-up was also made to principals when survey participation permission was received from Superintendents. Email reminders were sent to principals one week after the initial email or phone conference. Volunteer completion of the survey demonstrated teachers' willingness to participate in the research study.

Figure 3: A survey from a process perspective.



(Groves, et al., 2009, p.47).

Having a purposive sampling method, this study used a correlation analysis, regression analysis, and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess principals' practices and the state of RTI implementation as perceived by teachers. A purposive sampling method is used to gather information specific data (Patton, 2001). Using the survey, participants' responses were collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Creswell, 2009; deVaus, 2002). The data had then

undergone statistical aggregation allowing results to reveal what leadership practices during RTI implementation are emphasized by principals as perceived by teachers.

Population and Sample

For this study, there were 389 certified elementary teachers that participated. Participants were elementary teachers from 14 different school districts in southeastern Georgia. Within the 14 school districts, each of the 53 elementary schools had approximately 60 certified teachers. Therefore, the population was calculated to be approximately 3,180 certified teacher participants. Using an online resource http://research-advisors.com/tools/SampleSize.htm, the required minimal sample size for this study was between 357 and 365 participants with a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. A confidence interval gives a range of values that results will lie and can be taken with a 95% level of confidence (deVaus, 2002; Groves, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau, 2009).

With permission, all certified teachers within the 14 districts were invited to participate in the study. Typically, the classroom teacher provides the initial intervention in the general education setting. As the intensity of interventions increase, other instructional personnel become involved within the RTI process and/or will administer instruction (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Moore & Whitfield, 2009). Therefore, for this study, certified teachers include classroom teachers, special education teachers, reading instructors, instructional coaches, and other certified personnel such as intervention specialists, counselors and psychologists.

Since RTI is predominantly found within elementary schools, only elementary teachers (i.e., general education teachers, special education teachers, and other certified instructional/support personnel) who have completed one full academic year or more within their current school district were invited to participate in the study (Bender & Shores, 2007).

Instrumentation

The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) developed by Kouzes and Posner along with six additional researcher-created questions were used for this study. The LPI is a leadership instrument with five subscales that reliably measures specific practices of a principal. The LPI is an appropriate instrument for this study because this differentiation of leadership practices can be applied to principals' implementation of an RTI model as demonstrated in the review of literature. Fowler (1995) stated that when reliable answers and "valid measures of something we want to describe" are produced, only then is that a good question (p.2). Educational researchers has used the LPI because its questions are known for and used to gauge a leader's managerial skills, believability, collaboration, and actual outcomes (Abu-Tineh, Khasawneh, & Omary, 2009). Therefore, the LPI was used to analyze teachers' perceptions of their principals' practices as they engage in RTI-related activities. As principals' observers, teachers are to respond to the questions in the LPI to share their perspective of the leadership practices their principal has modeled.

After interviewing over 1,000 leaders on the topic of leadership, the authors, Kouzes and Posner, created the LPI to assess exemplary leadership practices that contributed to organizational success. A review of literature described the five best practices of principals and their association with RTI implementation. The LPI was chosen for this study because its five leadership categories align with the literature review on principals' practices in the following ways: Model the Way *(Direction),* Inspire a Shared Vision *(Vision),* Challenge the Process *(Challenger),* Enable Others to Act *(Supporter),* and Encourage the Heart *(Motivator).*

1) Model the way

At the very beginning of a project or program, the leader is to share with subordinates

clear instructions about the goal of the project. At this initial stage, the leader's behaviors should exemplify the expectations of the project's goals. At the initial stages of RTI implementation, this may also be at the start of the new school year, it is to be shared with teachers that RTI practices are important and some level of expectation from the principal is witnessed.

2) Inspire a shared vision

The leaders is to provide a clear and inspiring vision to give subordinates direction regarding the new program. As the leader shares hopeful outcomes for the duration of the new program implementation, the leader is also able to listen to members and even revise or restructure behaviors or practices in order to meet the program's goal. In regards to RTI, the leader is to be able share with teachers how their behaviors, both individually and collectively, will positively impact student achievement. This vision could be exemplified by using stories of success from other schools locally or from student successes within their own building.

3) Challenge the Process

Teachers often remember leaders that presented a new project or task that required of them a new outlook, perspective or use a different strategy unfamiliar to them (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). These leaders have demonstrated whether directly or indirectly to the organization, their willingness to take risks and enter into the unknown. This practice of experimentation with new concepts to get a more in depth understanding of existing practices is not far-reaching to some leaders. Within the RTI process, because of its ambiguity in implementation, leaders will create their own method of execution within their school. At times, this method of execution will not be similar to those of other schools even within the very same district. Therefore, leaders will step into the unknown and even take risks.

4) Enable others to act

Within an organization, teamwork is critical to the success of a new program. An exemplary leader does not only share ideas, but listen to other's ideas and various perspectives about the new program and program efforts. The leader then is able to support members' suggestions and is willing to move program efforts forward using the advice from members as well. As discussions occur amongst the principal and teachers, the principal learns of teacher ideas regarding their role, school goals and student progress within the RTI process. As a result, the principal responds dependent upon his/her style of leadership.

5) Encourage the heart

An exemplary leader rewards or recognition member behaviors that have helped the program initiative within the organization. Members are praised openly or are receivers of acts of appreciation for their cooperation or role in the program. Within the RTI process, teachers are praised for their providing interventions to students or sharing of information with colleagues on the RTI team. These acts of collaboration have the potential to be noted and rewarded openly by the principal or principal's designee.

The characteristics measured in the LPI also align with tenets noted in the six ISLLC standards, the 10 Georgia Leader Keys and the Georgia Pyramid of Interventions manual (Table 3). The LPI is a 30-item survey that asks teachers their perception of how frequent their principals emphasize leadership practices (APPENDIX C). Responses to survey questions about attitudes, beliefs and behaviors are subjective and apt to change over a period of time (Glasow, 2005). Therefore the LPI is used as it provides a series of questions on each related practice. For this study, teachers indicated the frequency of emphasized practices during RTI implementation using the LPI ten-point Likert scale being: (1-*almost never*, 2-*rarely*, 3-*seldom*,

Table 3

ISLLC standards, Georgia Leader Keys and RTI manual tenets associated with LPI

Principal Practices	**MTW** Model the Way	**ISV** Inspire a Shared Vision	**CTP** Challenge the Process	**EOA** Enable others to Act	**ETH** Encourage the Heart
ISLLC	5, 6	1	3	2	4
Georgia Leader Keys	Managing Operations Leading Change Relationship Development	Data Analysis Organizational Culture Performance Mgmt. & Process Improvement	Curriculum Assessment Managing Operations	Standards-Based Instruction Professional Learning Leading Change	Professional Learning Relationship Development
Georgia RTI manual: *Building Level Leadership*	1	2	5, 6	3, 4	3

4-*once in a while*, 5-*occasionally*, 6-*sometimes*, 7-*fairly often*, 8-*usually*, 9-*very frequently*, and 10-*always*) (APPENDIX D).

The LPI is formatted so that the six statements for each of the five leadership practices are alternated throughout the survey to prevent response bias (APPENDIX E). Survey items are then divided into five pre-determined leadership categories: MTW= Model the Way, ISV= Inspire a Shared Vision, CTP = Challenge the Process, EOA = Enable others to Act, ETH = Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) (Appendix E). There were five separate totals as there are five pre-determined leadership categories. There were a total for the column with item numbers 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26; a separate total for the column with items 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27; and so on (see APPENDIX F).

Permission was received from the authors Kouzes and Posner to use and modify the 2002 version of the LPI (APPENDIX G). Therefore, the phrase '*in regards to RTI implementation'* was added to each of the 30 items. This conversion did not impact validity or reliability of the survey.

Survey items on the original LPI have strong reliability and validity according to Kouzes and Posner (2002). The LPI has both high internal (.80+) and test-retest reliability. Having undergone factor analysis, the LPI also has strong face validity as it is effective at measuring a leader's personal-best and the statements are directly related to leadership attributes and/or practices. The reliability of the LPI is enhanced as it provides six items, as opposed to two or three items, per attribute. Survey items also have a high correlation relating strongly to one another within its category. Computed coefficient alphas for each of the five leadership practices sub-scales of the LPI-Observer-2002 were challenging the process (.81), inspiring a shared vision (.88), enabling others to act (.86), modeling the way (.82), and encouraging the heart (.92). Though the internal consistency measures of reliability of the LPI have been established to assure that it is an appropriate instrument for this study, the modified version was piloted. Computed coefficient alphas for each of the *modified* LPI sub-scales were challenging the process (.96), inspiring a shared vision (.97), enabling others to act (.96), modeling the way (.95), and encouraging the heart (.96). Tested and re-tested within different institutional settings and having different formats, the LPI has been used successfully for nearly 30 years. For these reasons, the LPI was used to identify the practices frequently used by principals during RTI implementation as perceived by teachers.

In research, identifying variables and determining the best way to measure them is important (Moore & McCabe, 2006). Considering the aforementioned, a Likert scale is most

appropriate for measuring attitudes and having an odd number of response items will offer participants a neutral choice (Passmore, Dobbie, Parchman, & Tysinger, 2002). For this reason, a Likert scale was used for this study. An advantage of using a Likert scale is that responses are quantifiable measuring their level of agreement to each item. The higher the mean (i.e., Low 1-3, Middle 4-7, High 8-10) for each practice and the higher overall score on the LPI (i.e., Less Favorable 6-10, Moderate 11-20, Favorable 21-30) the more teachers perceive their principals model leadership practices during RTI implementation. Completion time for the 2002 version of the 30-item LPI with 10 response choices lasted approximately 10-15 minutes, according to Kouzes and Posner. Using a modified LPI for this research, the 10-15 completion times were piloted by a group of ten RTI experts who did not participate in the study. Results from Georgia Southern University's online survey database Qualtrics, duration times on the modified LPI averaged four to six minutes.

At the end of the modified 30-item LPI, an additional section was added to the survey concerning the six researcher-created questions to assess teachers' perception of the state of RTI implementation at their school (APPENDIX H). A review of literature supports the following six researcher-created questions (APPENDIX I).

1. I understand my role within the RTI process at my school.
2. I understand the role of each RTI team member at my school.
3. I believe that the RTI process is effective at my school.
4. I believe that other teachers are knowledgeable of the RTI process in my school.
5. I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of the RTI process at my school.
6. I think that RTI implementation at my school is successful.

Teachers indicated their perception of the state of RTI implementation using a four-point Likert scale being: (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-agree, and 4-strongly agree). The higher the total score and the mean (i.e., 1 – Low, 4 – High) for the six researcher-created questions, the more favorable teacher's perceive RTI implementation at their school (i.e., Low – 6, Moderate – 15 or less, High – 24 or less). Questions were field tested with a group of ten RTI experts who were not a part of the study. Field-testing of questions is to assure that questions are free of biased wording or context (Glasow, 2005). All questions were tested for reliability using Cronbach's Coefficient *Alphas*. A correlation coefficient $> .70$ is considered "acceptable" (deVaus, 2002). Any question that is not conceptually relevant to the study (i.e., *weak correlation coefficients* < 0.30) would have been eliminated in order to increase internal reliability of questions (deVaus, 2002). Corrected-item total correlations and coefficient alphas were calculated for the six researcher-created questions prior to and after distributing the survey (Table 4). Field-testing of questions and final survey analysis both yielded an alpha coefficient above .70, (.90 and .896 respectively). No adjustments to the questions were made based upon feedback and recommendations from the expert group.

Data Collection

A request to conduct a study within these southeastern Georgia school districts was emailed to all school superintendents/designee. School superintendents/designee were considered as "gatekeepers, individuals at the research site that provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done" (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). Emails were sent using the researchers Georgia Southern student email account. Once permission was granted, the researcher sent a cover letter, informed consent letter and a link to the survey via email.

Table 4

Reliability Statistics for the six researcher-created questions on implementation

Implementation	**Corrected-Item Total Correlation for survey Distribution Before – After**
1. I understand my role within the RTI process at my school.	.65 - .70
2. I understand the role of each RTI team member at my school	.85 - .71
3. I believe that the RTI process is effective at my school.	.39 - .66
4. I believe that other teachers are knowledgeable of the RTI process in my school.	.85 - .62
5. I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of the RTI process at my school.	.85 - .80
6. I think that RTI implementation at my school is successful.	.85 - .83
Alpha Coefficient	**.90 - .896**

Superintendents were asked to forward the email invitation to elementary principals and then their teachers. Participants were invited to complete the survey within a three week time period receiving two email reminders along the way. Survey data were aggregated using the researcher's Georgia Southern Qualtrics student account. Using an online survey, anonymous survey responses were archived within the researcher's Georgia Southern University Qualtrics student account.

Upon receipt of approval from the Institutional Review Board at Georgia Southern University, school superintendents within the southeastern districts of Georgia received an email from the researcher's Georgia Southern University student account. Superintendents' email addresses were retrieved from the Georgia DOE website. This database is updated at the start of each school year. Therefore, the likelihood of contacting individuals who are no longer within the school system was decreased. Once permission was granted, being indicated via email

correspondence, school superintendents/designees were asked to distribute the survey to all elementary principals within their district. In the principals' email invitation, a cover letter was included with a request for permission to conduct the study within their school. The cover letter provided the purpose of the study, researcher background and an appeal to increase cooperation followed by a link to access the survey. Once permission was granted, principals were asked to distribute the survey to all certified elementary teachers within their building.

Data were collected via an electronic version of the LPI. Within the email sent to certified southeastern Georgia teachers, an informed consent letter was attached (see APPENDIX J). The survey was created using GSU's Qualtrics, a web-service that temporarily archived participants' responses. To maintain teacher anonymity, a mixed code of letters and numbers was electronically assigned to participants as they complete the survey (deVaus, 2002).

The survey then proceeded with a 10-item demographics section (see APPENDIX K). The demographic section was needed to compare subgroup responses as well as for general information on participants. For example, RTI is not only dominant within the elementary setting, but also primarily between Kindergarten and grade three in which interventions to develop the reading skills of fluency and comprehension are frequently used (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). Other demographic items included number of years teaching, age, gender, grade level taught, highest degree earned, position held, county, and initial RTI coordinator. According to Fowler (1995), respondents that are less-educated tend to agree more to questions compared to respondents that are more educated. For this reason, degree level was included in the demographics section. All of the listed positions are required to hold a Georgia teacher's certificate and are typically recommended members of RTI data/decision-making team (Fuchs, 2003; GADOE, 2011; NJCLD, 2005). Last in the demographic section was a question for

teachers to indicate the frequency of their interactions with their principal that are RTI related. In some districts, principals do not coordinate or are directly involved in RTI implementation. Therefore, RTI related principal-teacher exchanges may be few. This does not indicate a principal's professional competency or leadership ability.

Several strategies were used to ensure and enhance survey response and accuracy. First, to ensure survey response, the survey was mailed electronically (Bonometti & Jun, 2006) to currently employed elementary administrators and elementary teachers (Baruch, 1999) after the opening of school but, before an extended holiday or school break to avoid absenteeism or over-surveying (Weiner & Dalessio, 2006). Then, participants were given approximately three weeks to complete the survey with an email reminder one week after initial invitation and again three days prior to submission deadline. If response rate were low, the completion date for the survey would have been extended for another week or until the minimum number of participants were met to avoid nonresponse bias. Next, to enhance survey response, a detailed letter of consent preceded the survey that included a description of the research and how their responses would contribute to the literature on principal practices and RTI implementation. This statement was to give respondents a sense of purpose and to note that their time is valuable (deVaus, 2002). No use of incentives by the researcher was offered initially as incentives have not been found to be statistically significant to increase response rates (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). However, when the response rate remained significantly low, a follow-up phone call was made to school Superintendents and Principals. During phone conversations, school-based incentives were recommended by the researcher to principals to increase participant response such as administrator provide additional items to classroom treasure box, lunch with principal offered to teachers to use as a student incentive, administrator cover teacher's class for short time period, or

a one (1) day permission ticket for the teacher to dress casual. To ensure survey accuracy, survey submissions from the same IP address was coded as "spam" to eliminate duplicate responses. When the minimum required number of survey responses was submitted, the researcher began examining the data.

Data Analyses

Using a current version of computer software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), participant responses were analyzed to address each research question. A correlation analysis was conducted for the first, third and fourth research questions. In addition to conducting a regression analysis for the first research question and an analysis of variance for the second research question.

Principals' practices as perceived by teachers were first calculated to find composite (mean) scores for each participants' responses to the 30 leadership items on the survey. Composite (mean) scores for each of the 30 practices could range from a one (1) to a ten (10). Then composite scores were calculated for the pre-determined categories. There are six items in each column and the ratings used could range from 1 to 10 using the Likert scale. The five leadership categories are: MTW= Model the Way, ISV= Inspire a Shared Vision, CTP = Challenge the Process, EOA = Enable others to Act, ETH = Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Each category could range from a low sum of 6 (scored as 1 for each attribute) up to a high sum of 60 (scored as 10 for each attribute). Scores would result in a low composite (average) score of one (1) or a high composite score of ten (10). In SPSS, teacher responses were grouped according to the pre-determined leadership practices categories and calculated (see APPENDIX F). Survey items with no score were excluded in SPSS. This had minimal impact on the data as mean scores for each category were calculated (deVaus, 2002). For example, using

the *model the way* category, if item 1 score = 8, item 6 score = 5, item 11 = no score, item 16 = 9, item 21 = 10, and item 26 = no score, the mean is calculated using 8+5+9+10 = 32, then 32/4 = 8. Category means (i.e., composite scores) were used to develop an explanation of practices principals displayed during RTI implementation as perceived by teachers that are most common in southeastern Georgia.

RQ1: What is the relationship between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices towards RTI implementation? First, composite (mean) scores for each participant's response to all 30 leadership practices were calculated. Composite scores for the 30 practices could range from a one (1) to a ten (10). Therefore, the higher the composite score using participants' ratings of principal leadership practices, the stronger teachers' perception that principals' demonstrate that particular practice. To examine differences among the demographic categories (i.e., number of years teaching, position held, earned degree, grade level taught, person in charge of RTI, age, and frequency of principal interaction) a regression analysis was conducted. Regression analysis was used to learn which of the participant demographics best predict favorable perceptions of the leadership practices of principals. Regression analysis allow one to determine which of the demographics, when considered simultaneously, are associated most strongly with principals' leadership practices. Since the demographic item *grade level taught* allowed for more than one response to be selected, data analysis required the recoding of the variable resulting in statistical error and was therefore eliminated.

RQ2: Given that significant relationship is found between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices, what is the difference in the identified demographic variables? An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to

determine how demographic groups differed regarding their perception of principals' practices. ANOVA results indicated whether differences were due to sampling error or if there were real differences within each demographic group (deVaus, 2002). Therefore, the researcher examined how descriptors within the demographic items varied regarding principals' practices. When differences in mean scores were revealed, F-test figures and post hoc comparisons were noted. F-test figures indicate whether or not differences within the group are due to sampling error (deVaus, 2002). Since six demographic items had five or more contexts, differences among groups were expected. Therefore, instead of using a Bonferroni post hoc comparison in which group differences are not planned, a Scheffé comparison in the one-way ANOVA was utilized to identify the group pairs that had large differences not due to sampling error (deVaus, 2002).

RQ3: What is the relationship between the five principal leadership practices categories and the state of RTI implementation? For sub-question three, a Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted. Pearson's *r* was used to examine the relationship between each exemplary practice category and the state of RTI implementation (deVaus, 2002). Correlations tell how likely one variable will affect the other variable. DeVaus (2002) operationally defines the strength of correlations as follows: a) 0 to .29 – "*no to low association*", b) .30 to .49 – "*moderate to substantial association*", c) .50 to .69 – "*substantial to strong association*", and .70 and above – "*very strong to near perfect association*" (p.259). A hypothesis for this research question was that there is a moderate correlation between teachers' perception of principals' leadership practices (independent variable) and the state of RTI implementation (dependent variable).

Composite scores for each of the five categorized practices and the six additional researcher-created questions on implementation to assess perception of implementation were

calculated. Composite scores for each LPI category could range from a one (1) to a ten (10) and for the six researcher-created questions on implementation, from a one (1) to a four (4). Thus, the higher the mean score for each exemplary practice, the stronger the relationship with a more favorable state of RTI implementation.

A correlation analysis was conducted between the five sub-scales (independent variables) and RTI implementation (dependent variable) using SPSS. While conducting the correlation, a *listwise* deletion subcommand was used for any LPI survey item that had a missing case although a "respond before proceeding" feature was used when the survey was created. That particular item was eliminated from all correlations in order to conduct an accurate analysis in response to sub-question one

RQ4: What is the relationship between the 30 itemized principal leadership practices and the state of RTI implementation as perceived by elementary teachers? Similar to research question three, a Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relationship between two interval variables, such as principals' leadership practices and the overall state of implementation (deVaus, 2002). A correlation analysis was conducted between each of the 30 leadership practices (independent variables) and implementation (dependent variable) using the composite scores for each variable calculated in SPSS.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

The focus of this study is on teachers' perceptions of leadership practices used by principals within elementary school settings during RTI implementation. All elementary schools within the southeastern Georgia school districts are implementing an RTI model that contributes to the validity of the study (Regional Educational Service Agency, 2012). However, there are limitations that could threaten the results of the study. First, this study is cross-sectional in

nature in that it collects data from participants during one time period. Cross-sectional data provides a limited perspective because it was not collected over a period of time to provide sufficient evidence needed to make an informed decision. Secondly, because this study is using a self-report, survey design, the results were defined by only those that responded. Third, teachers may have received their initial RTI training under different leadership within their school. For example, an elementary school principal may not have been designated as the primary coordinator of implementation. Some schools used intervention specialists, counselors or other RTI coordinators to conduct the initial implementation of RTI in the school. In this case, one additional item was added to the demographics section of the survey asking teachers "who initially coordinated RTI implementation in your school?" Nevertheless, it is ultimately the principal's responsibility to initiate RTI implementation and ensure its fidelity. Fourth, because RTI implementation is very closely associated with the use of materials, conducting interventions and interacting with other teachers, it may be difficult for participants to differentiate between the elements of the process and the principals' behaviors during implementation. Therefore, instructions were provided at the beginning of the survey for participants to only consider the practices of their most recent principal in regards to implementation and not the RTI process itself (i.e., type/frequency of interventions, materials used, moving students between tiers, individualized support from RTI team members or other personnel, etc.) while taking the survey. The responses of teachers' experiences should be reflective of their perception of the leadership practices of the principal that overseen RTI implementation, not of intervention strategies or past experiences with an RTI model. Taken together, data collection and sample size, however, are limitations that are not significant enough to compromise the validity of this study.

There are two delimitations with this study. An exclusionary delimitation is that invitations to participate in the research were only given to elementary school principals', teachers and other certified personnel. Middle and/or high school teachers and principals were not invited to participate as RTI models were initially and predominantly implemented within elementary schools (Bender & Shores, 2007). Secondly, this study was conducted only within elementary schools in the southeastern districts of Georgia. The leadership practices demonstrated by other elementary school principals across the state of Georgia were not included and neither were the perceptions of other elementary teachers recorded.

There are assumptions that were considered while conducting this study. To begin, the researcher assumed that participant responses are honest and from the best of their recollection. It was also assumed that elementary principals within the participating school districts of Georgia have modeled some degree of leadership practices in relation to RTI implementation. The researcher assumed that all principal behaviors are incorporated or described within LPI. Finally, it was also assumed that the results of this study are representative of all the teachers within the school district and within the Southeastern Georgia region regarding their perception of their principals' style of leadership during implementation of an RTI model.

SUMMARY

As more schools are adopting a multi-tiered intervention model to address the needs of students and the disproportionate number of minorities in special education, the RTI model is becoming more prevalent and is being implemented by school leaders across the state. Therefore the role of the principal has shifted becoming more closely related to that of a *business administrator-principal* in essence changing the principal's practices as well. As a result, ISLLC standards for school leadership and the Georgia Leadership Keys have been created to help principals ensure the effectiveness of learning and student outcomes.

Present-day research on RTI practices often includes field studies, a focus on the interventions provided, the RTI process itself, or best practices used by teachers. However, little is known about the practices demonstrated by principals during the implementation of the RTI framework and teachers' perceptions of them.

This study used a modification of Kouzes and Posner's LPI as a survey. The goal of this research was to use the LPI and six additional researcher-created questions to capture teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership practices during RTI implementation within their school. Since RTI is predominantly found in elementary schools, only elementary school teachers and principals were invited to participate.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The research was designed to answer the overarching question: What are elementary principals' leadership practices during RTI implementation as perceived by teachers? The methodology used in the research process was a quantitative survey. Data for the study was collected using an online survey that was developed from the literature, modified, then field tested before distribution. Responses were archived using Qualtrics, an online survey database, and then downloaded into a statistical analysis program (SPSS). In response to research sub-questions, data analysis was conducted according to deVaus' (2002) and Groves', et al., (2009) method of survey analysis. In this chapter, demographic data, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and ANOVA results are revealed.

There were 389 certified elementary teachers in southeastern Georgia that completed the online survey. Although the survey return rate was 12% of the population (3,180), the number of survey participants exceeded the required minimal sample size range of 357 to 365 with a confidence interval of 95% and margin of error of 5%. For some analysis, a confidence interval of 99% and margin of error of 1% was used and noted.

Within the survey, a 10-item demographics section was included to compare subgroup responses and general participant information. Out of 389 participants, 243 (63%) were general education teachers, 28 (7%) were Special education teachers, 10 (3%) were school counselors, 3 (<1%) were psychologists and 79 (20%) indicated being either an English Language Specialist, Instructional Specialist, Resource/Support, or other instructional personnel. Combined, 267 (67%) teachers indicated having at least 10 years of teaching experience. A minimum of 310 (80%) participants indicated that they currently teach within a Title I school. Elementary grade

levels taught by participants were almost equally represented with 134 (34%) for grades K-1, 118 (30%) for grades 2-3, and 115 (30%) for grades 4-5. Three hundred forty-eight participants (90%) were female and 13 (3%) were male. Demographic items specific to research questions are reported in this chapter and a summary of demographic data is presented (Table 5).

Overview of Findings

Research question one. A correlation and a regression analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices (PLP) towards RTI implementation? The two analyses are interconnected (deVaus, 2002).

1. A correlation analysis reveals that two demographic items, the frequency of RTI related principal-teacher interaction ($r = .302^*$) and teacher's age ($.143^*$), are associated with teachers' perception of PLP regarding RTI implementation at the $p<.01$ level of significance.
2. A regression analysis reveals that the frequency of RTI related principal-teacher interaction ($r = .302^*$) and teacher's age ($.143^*$) are predictors of teachers' perceptions of PLP at the $p<.01$ and $p<.05$ level of significance, respectively.

Research question two. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine how perceptions of PLP differed within demographic items. From these analyses, ANOVA findings revealed the following:

1. Mean scores of teachers' ratings of perceived PLP increased as the frequency of RTI-related principal-teacher exchanges occur. Statistically significant differences in mean scores of PLP were revealed among teacher sub-groups of those that met.

Table 5

*Responses and Rate of Elementary Teacher Surveys by Demographics** (*N*=389)

Demographics	Responses	Rate (%)	Demographics	Responses	Rate (%)
1. Number of years teaching			6. Grade level taught		
One or Less - Novice	20	5.1	K-1	134	34
2 – 5 years - Beginning	48	12.3	2-3	118	30.3
6 – 9 years - Experienced	54	13.9	4-5	115	29.6
10 – 14 years - Veteran	81	20.8	All of the above	89	22.9
15 – 24 years - Expert	127	32.6			
25 or more years	59	15.2			
2. Position held			7. Who is in charge of RTI implementation in your building?		
General Education Teacher	243	62.5			
Special Education Teacher	28	7.2			
Counselor	10	2.6	Principal	77	19.8
Psychologist	3	.8	Assistant Principal	43	11.1
Other Position*	79	20.3	Special Education Teacher	5	1.3
Missing	26	6.7	Psychologist	7	1.8
			Counselor	174	44.7
			Intervention Specialist	40	10.3
			Other **	13	3.3
			Missing	30	7.7
3. Number of years in current school			8. How often do you have RTI –related interaction with your principal?		
One or Less	16	4.1			
2 – 5 years	124	31.9			
6 – 9 years	80	20.6			
10 – 14 years	68	17.5	Less than Once a Month	153	39.3
15 – 24 years	53	13.6	Once a Month	93	23.9
25 or more years	21	5.4	2-3 Times a Month	66	17.0
Missing	27	6.9	Once a Week	33	8.5
			2-3 Times a Week	9	2.3
			Daily	8	2.1
			Missing	27	6.9
4. Highest Degree Earned			9. Age		
Bachelor's	86	22.1	18-24 years	4	1.0
Master's	175	45.0	25-34 years	68	17.5
Specialist	88	22.6	35-44 years	117	30.1
Doctorate	10	2.6	45-54 years	103	26.5
Missing	30	7.7	55 and older	68	17.5
			Missing	29	7.5
5. Title I School			10.Gender		
Yes	310	79.7	Male	13	3.3
No	53	13.6	Female	348	89.5
Missing	26	6.7	Missing	28	7.2

Missing (number of participants that did not provide a response for survey items).
***Other Position* (i.e., English Language Specialist, Instructional Specialist, Resource/ Support)
****Other* (i.e., District level personnel, etc.)

with the principal once a month (M = 8.24), 2 – 3 times a month (M = 8.42), and 2 – 3 times a week (M = 8.46).

2. Combined, counselors (50%) and psychologists (100%) had the most frequent interaction with principals regarding RTI at a minimum rate of *once a week.*
3. Multiple comparisons revealed that there were no significant mean differences in PLP by *teachers' age.*

Research question three. A correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the five categories of exemplary practices (i.e., model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart) and the state of RTI implementation. From this analysis, findings revealed that:

- Statistical analysis indicate that all five sub-scales (IV) are positively and significantly related, at the .01 level of significance (as $p = .01 < p = .05$), to the state of RTI implementation (DV) as perceived by elementary teachers.

Research question four. A correlation analysis was conducted to specify which of the 30 itemized practices were associated with implementation. From this analysis, findings revealed that:

- Statistical analysis indicated that all 30 practices within each sub-scale are positively and significantly associated, at the .01 level of significance to RTI implementation as perceived by elementary teachers.

Other findings that are pertinent to this study are as follows: 1) almost half (45%) of participants reported that counselors are the person in charge of RTI, 2) principals have RTI related interactions with teachers less than once a month (42%) and 3) 310 (81%) of participating schools are Title I.

Findings

Findings for research question one. What is the relationship between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices towards RTI implementation? To determine differences in demographic data, a composite score for each participant was calculated using their responses to the 30 leadership practice items. Composite (mean) scores for each of the 30 practices could range from a one (1) to a ten (10). Thus, the higher the mean score for each item, the more favorable the perception of principals' practices. To begin, a correlation analysis was conducted between the 10 demographic items (IV) and the composite scores for each of 30 leadership practice items (DV). The correlation coefficient (r) indicates how strongly the independent variable is correlated with the dependent variable. The closer the *r* coefficient is to 1.00 the greater the correlation (deVaus, 2002). Therefore, the higher the correlation between each leadership practice and teacher demographic, the more favorable are teachers' perceptions of principals' practices within that demographic group.

Correlation analysis reveals that two of the ten teacher demographics, *frequency of principal interaction* and *teacher's age,* indicate a positive association with teachers' perception of principals' leadership practices regarding RTI implementation (Table 6). Results indicate that the number of RTI related principal-teacher exchanges ($r = .302^*$) and the age of the teacher ($r = .143^*$) are associated with teachers' perception of principals' leadership at the $p < .01$ level of significance. The demographic variable of *grades taught* was included in the data analysis however; it resulted in a statistical error due to multiple responses for the one variable.

Table 6

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Demographics toward Principal Leadership Practices (N=389).

	Correlations										
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Principals' Leadership Practices	---										
2. Years of teaching	.064	---									
3. Position held	.053	.263*	---								
4. Years in current school	.100	.556*	.098	---							
5. Degree	.002	.293*	.202*	.165*	---						
6. Title I	-.005	-.003	.079	.026	.028	---					
7. Grades taught	–	–	–	–	–	–	---				
8. Person in charge of RTI	-.070	.005	.043	-.061	.085	-.323*	–	---			
9. Frequency of RTI principal exchanges	.302*	.119*	.271*	.104*	.079	.042	–	-.036	---		
10. Age	.143*	.641*	.203*	.338*	.144*	-.042	–	-.001	.090	---	
11. Gender	-.001	-.090	-.141*	.067	-.139	-.046	–	-.070	-.116*	-.102	---
Mean	7.55	4.09	2.03	3.22	2.06	1.15		3.92	2.10	3.45	1.96
SD	2.27	1.42	1.62	1.33	.77	.35		1.92	1.24	1.04	.187

Note: Analysis for demographic item *grades taught* resulted in statistical error due to multiple responses.
*p < .01.

Correlation results are reported as part of the regression analysis as the two analyses are interconnected (deVaus, 2002). As indicated by the correlation results, a regression analysis determines which of the demographics, when considered simultaneously, is associated most strongly with favorable ratings of PLP. With a correlation analysis, the strength of a one-to-one association (the higher the correlation coefficient the more likely the association) between the two variables of *frequency of RTI interactions with principal* to *PLP* and *age* to *PLP* is measured (deVaus, 2002, p.282). Unlike a correlation analysis, a regression analysis allows a prediction to be made about principals' leadership practices based upon the frequency of RTI related principal-teacher exchanges that occur and the age of the teacher. Therefore, to determine which of these two demographics best predict teacher ratings of PLP, a regression analysis was conducted (Table 7).

Table 7

Regression of Principals' Leadership Practices on Frequency of Principal Interaction and Teacher's Age (N=356)

Variable	b	se b	95% CI	t
Frequency of RTI interactions with principal	.530	.093	.348, .713	5.72**
Age	.250	.111	.031, .713	2.25*
Intercept	5.57	.429	4.73, 6.41	12.99**

Note: R^2 = .103, adj. $\underline{R}^2$ = .098, F = 20.29*, df = 2, 353.
*p < .05, **p < .01.

Results of the regression analysis show that the frequency of principal-teacher exchanges and the teachers' age are positively and statistically significant predictors of teachers' perception of principals' leadership practices. According to data analysis, the mean rating of principal leadership practices would be 5.57, as indicated by *b*, if there were no principal-teacher interactions and if the age of the teacher was zero. However, for every 1% increase in either the frequency of principal-teacher interactions or the age of the teacher, ratings of principals' leadership practices can be predicted to increase by either .530 or .250, respectively.

Results indicate that the greater the *frequency of principal-teacher exchanges* (t = 5.52**) and the higher the *age of the teacher* (t = 2.25*), the higher the teacher ratings of *principal leadership practices*. The t-value indicates that there are differences within each demographic item, but does not indicate where these differences occur. This means that there are demographic sub-groups that are significant predictors of teachers' ratings of principals' practices. Similarly, the *F*-ratio = 20.29* indicates that there are differences in the means of the sub-groups and that these mean differences are not due to sampling error or happened by chance (deVaus, 2002).

The regression coefficient (*r*) indicates how strongly the independent variables (frequency of RTI interaction and age) are associated with or best predicts the dependent variable (leadership practices). The closer the *r* coefficient is to 1.00, the greater the correlation (deVaus, 2002). The r-squared value (R^2 = .098) shows that 10% of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practices can be predicted using the two demographic variables of frequency and age. An *F*-ratio also tests the null hypothesis (i.e., the *r*-squared value will be equal to zero indicating no relationship between the independent and dependent variables) (deVaus, 2002). In this case, the null hypothesis is rejected and further analysis was performed.

Findings for research question two. Given that significant relationship is found between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices (PLP), what is the difference in the identified demographic variables? A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine how perceptions of principals' practices differed within the demographic sub-groups of *frequency of principal-teacher exchanges* and the *teachers' age* given the predictive power of the regression analysis. First, ANOVA was conducted to learn how ratings of principals' leadership practices (DV) differed among the demographic groups within frequency of principal-teacher exchanges (IV) (Table 8).

ANOVA results show that the lowest mean in teachers' ratings of perceived principal practices was received by teachers that had RTI-related interactions with the principal less than once a month (M = 6.52). Mean scores of teachers' ratings of perceived principal practices increased as the frequency of RTI-related principal-teacher exchanges occur (i.e., teachers that met with the principal *once a month* (M = 8.24), *2 – 3 times a month* (M = 8.42), and *2 – 3 times a week* (M = 8.46).

Table 8

ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Leadership Practices by Frequency of RTI related Principal-Teacher Interactions (N=359)

Frequency of Interaction		Mean	SD	n
Less than once a month		6.52	2.46	151
Once a month		8.24	1.93	93
2 – 3 times a month		8.42	1.46	66
Once a week		8.05	2.31	32
2 – 3 times a week		8.46	1.48	9
Daily		7.55	1.14	8
Source	SS	df	MS	F
Frequency	281	5	56.22	12.53*****
Error	1584.43	353	4.49	

* p < .01

ANOVA results indicate that the frequency of RTI related principal-teacher interactions that occur does appear to influence teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practices during implementation. Statistical analysis of *frequency of RTI related principal-teacher interactions* show statistically significant mean differences in teachers' ratings of principals' leadership practices ($F_{5,353}$ = 12.53), p < .05) among the six groups examined.

Standard deviations for *frequency of interaction* ranged from 1.14 percentage points to 2.46 percentage points from the mean. Participants' cumulative ratings of principals' leadership practices were as low as a score of 4.0 and as high as a score of 9.9 on the Likert scale of 1 to 10. An F-value of 12.53* indicates that there are statistically significant differences between sub-

group means for *frequency of interaction*. Based on the data there are statistically significant differences of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practices according to the number of RTI-related interactions principals have with teachers.

Pairwise comparisons were conducted to isolate where the differences occur (Table 9). ANOVA results show that when the mean for the frequency group *less than once a month* is compared to the means of *once a month, 2 – 3 times a month,* and *once a week,* differences are significant and are not due to sampling error or happened by chance. The comparison of group means between *less than once a month* vs. *once a month* (M = 8.24, MD = -1.726**) and *less than once a month* vs. *2-3 times a month* (M = 8.42, -1.903**) are statistically significant at the p <.01 level of significance.

Table 9

Multiple Comparisons and Mean Differences in Principals' Leadership Practices by Frequency of Principal-Teacher RTI Interactions (N=359)

Comparison	Mean Difference	s.e.	95% CI
Less than once a month vs. Once a month	**-1.726****	.279	-2.66, -.79
Less than once a month vs. 2 – 3 times a month	**-1.903****	.312	-2.94, -.86
Less than once a month vs. Once a week	-1.538*	.412	-2.91, -.16
Less than once a month vs. 2 – 3 times a week	-1.943	.727	-4.38, .49
Less than once a month vs. Daily	-2.139	.769	-4.71, .43
Once a month vs. 2-3 times a month	-.177	.341	-1.31, .96
Once a month vs. Once a week	-.188	.434	-1.26, 1.64
Once a month vs. 2-3 times a week	-.217	.740	-2.69, 2.26
Once a month vs. Daily	-.413	.781	-3.03, 2.20
2-3 times a month vs. Once a week	.365	.456	-1.16, 1.89
2-3 times a month vs. 2-3 times a week	-.04	.753	-2.56, 2.48
2-3 times a month vs. Daily	-.236	.793	-2.89, 2.42
Once a week vs. 2-3 times a week	-.405	.800	-3.08, 2.27
Once a week vs. Daily	-.601	.837	-3.40, 2.20
2-3 times a week vs. Daily	-.196	1.029	-3.64, 3.25

*p < .05, **p < .01, where p-values are adjusted using the Scheffé method.

As a result of the pairwise comparisons, further analysis was conducted to distinguish which teacher groups provided the survey responses that indicated interactions with the principal

that resulted in the statistically significant frequencies indicated by the ANOVA analysis (Table 10). A summary of participants' responses to the demographic item frequency of principal-teacher RTI related interactions according to participants' position is presented.

Table 10

Rate of Responses to Demographic Item Frequency of Principal-Teacher Interaction by Position (N=359)

		Frequency of Principal-Teacher Interaction					
Position	*N*	Less than once a month	Once a month*	2-3 times a month*	Once a week*	2-3 times a week	Daily
General Education Teacher	243	116 (48%)	71 (29%)	35 (14%)	17 (7%)	1 (0%)	2 (1%)
Special Education Teacher	28	12 (43%)	6 (21%)	4 (14%)	3 (11%)	0	2 (7%)
Counselor	10	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	0
Psychologist	3	0	0	0	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	1 (33%)
Other Position*	79	24 (30%)	14 (18%)	9 (11%)	9 (11%)	4 (5%)	4 (5%)
Missing Responses	26						
Total	389	153	93	66	33	9	8
Mean		6.52	8.24	8.42	8.05	8.46	7.55

*Other position (i.e., English Language Specialist, Instructional Specialist, Resource/Support)

Data analysis revealed that classroom teachers (29%), special education teachers (21%), counselors (20%) and other personnel (18%) interacted with principals at the rate of *once a month*. At the rate of *2-3 times a week,* counselors (20%) reported to having the most frequent RTI related interactions with principals and other personnel (11%) reported to having the least frequent interaction. At the rate of *once a week,* psychologists (33%) and classroom teachers (7%) had the most and the least frequent interaction, respectively. In sum, counselors (50%) and

psychologists (100%) had the most frequent interaction with principals regarding RTI at a minimum rate of *once a week* to *daily*. As *frequency of interaction* increased from less than once a month to daily, participants' responses decreased. Additionally, responses according to teacher *positions*, which decrease in the number of students that each position works with on a daily basis, also decreased (Table 10).

Similarly, a one-way ANOVA (Table 11) and multiple comparisons (Table 12) were conducted to learn whether ratings on principals' leadership practices (DV) differ across the groups within *teacher's age* (IV). ANOVA results for the second leadership practices test indicate that the age of the teacher does appear to influence teachers' perceptions of PLP. Results indicate that the lowest mean score regarding principals' practices was reported by teachers between 25-34 years of age (M = 6.98). The highest mean was reported by teachers between 18 – 24 years of age (M = 8.95). Statistical analysis of *teachers' age* shows a significant difference in teachers' ratings of principals' leadership practices scores ($F_{4, 353} = 3.43$), $p < .01$) across the five groups examined.

Table 11

ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Principals' Leadership Practices by Teachers' Age (N=358)

Teachers' Age		Mean	SD	n
18-24 years		8.95	1.10	4
25-34 years		6.98	2.33	68
35-44 years		7.24	2.36	117
45-54 years		7.99	2.10	102
55 and older		7.90	2.16	67
Source	SS	df	MS	F
Interaction	60.00	4	17.25	3.43*
Error	1773.94	353	5.03	

Note. $R^2 = .020$, adj. $R^2 = .018$.
* $p < .01$

The *F*-ratio of 3.43* indicates that there are differences in sub-group means of *teachers' age*. The r-squared value (R^2 = .02) shows that 2% of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practices can be predicted using the demographic variable of teachers' age. The r-squared value of .018 is less than 1.0 which is a strong or perfect predictor of a correlation. Considering both the *F*-ratio and the R^2 value in the ANOVA analysis, the researcher continued with a pairwise comparison to locate mean differences among subgroups (Table 12). Pairwise comparisons revealed that there were no statistically significant mean differences among sub-groups within the demographic item of teachers' age.

Table 12

Multiple Comparisons and Mean Differences in Principals' Leadership Practices by Teachers' Age (N=358)

Comparison	Mean Difference	s.e.	95% CI
18-24 years vs. 25-34 years	1.967	1.15	-1.60, 5.54
18-24 years vs. 35-44 years	1.706	1.14	-1.82, 5.24
18-24 years vs. 45-54 years	.956	1.14	-2.58, 4.49
18-24 years vs. 55 and older	1.049	1.15	-2.52, 4.62
25-34 years vs. 35-44 years	-.260	.342	-1.32, .79
25-34 years vs. 45-54 years	-1.010	.351	-2.10, .077
25-34 years vs. 55 and older	-.918	.386	-2.11, .277
35-44 years vs. 45-54 years	-.750	.304	-1.69, .19
35-44 years vs. 55 and older	-.658	.343	-1.72, .406
45-54 years vs. 55 and older	.092	.353	-.999, 1.184

* $p < .05$, where p-values are adjusted using the Scheffé method.

Findings for research question three. What is the relationship between the five principal leadership practices categories and the state of RTI implementation? Pearson's product-moment correlations were conducted to address the second sub-question. Correlations are conducted to assess the relationship between the two variables of leadership practices (IV) and implementation (DV) (deVaus, 2002). Thus, the strength of a one-to-one association between two variables is measured.

To begin, composite (mean) scores for the six-implementation questions and the five categories of exemplary practices (i.e., challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the heart) were calculated for each participant. Ratings for each implementation item could range from a one (1) to a four (10). Thus, the higher the mean score for each item, the more favorable the perception of implementation.

A correlation analysis was then conducted between the composite scores for the six-implementation items (DV) and the composite scores for each of the five leadership practice categories (IV). A summary of the findings for the variables in this research question is presented. (Table 13).

Table 13

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Principals' Leadership Practices of Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the Way and Encouraging the Heart toward Implementation (N=352)

Variable	Correlations					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. CTP	---					
2. ISV	.96*	---				
3. EOA	.96*	.97*	---			
4. MTW	.95*	.90*	.91*	---		
5. ETH	.93*	.93*	.93*	.93*	---	
6. Implementation	.63*	.62*	.62*	.65*	.59*	---
M	7.6	7.3	7.3	7.9	7.6	3.2
SD	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.2	2.4	.60
Scale Min/Max Values	1 to 10	1 to 10	1 to 10	1 to 10	1 to 10	1 to 4

Note: CTP-challenge the process, ISV-inspire a shared vision, EOA-enable others to act, MTW-model the way, and ETH-encourage the heart.
Note: *Leadership Practices scale* – (1) almost never, (2) rarely, (3) seldom, (4) once in a while, (5) occasionally, (6) sometimes, (7) fairly often, (8) usually, (9) very frequently, (10) always. *Implementation (IMP) scale* – (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.
* $p < .01$.

Statistical findings indicate that all five leadership sub-scales (IV) are positively and significantly related, at the .01 level of significance (as $p = .01 < p = .05$), to RTI implementation (DV) as perceived by elementary teachers. Correlation coefficients for *implementation* range from an $r = .59^*$ to an $r = .65^*$. Results indicate that according to elementary teachers, the more frequently principals demonstrate the five exemplary leadership practices, the greater the perception of RTI implementation within their school.

Means for each LPI category ranged from 7.3 to 7.9, which is an indication that principals generally demonstrate practices within the five exemplary leadership categories (7) *fairly often* to (8) *usually* according to teachers' perceptions. Standard deviations are between 2.2 and 2.4 units from the mean indicating dispersion in teachers' perceptions of principals' exemplary leadership practices. As an example, teachers' perceptions of how often principals' demonstrate the leadership practice of *challenging the process* (M=7.6) has teacher ratings that range from 5.3 (occasionally) to 9.9 (very frequently/always).

Though all five sub-scales were positively and significantly related to implementation, frequency of teachers' responses to the six-implementation questions prompted further data analysis. Additional descriptive statistics were calculated for survey data from the implementation questions (Table 14). Frequencies (percentages) are used for nominal data. Means and standard deviations were calculated to describe continuous data.

Descriptive analysis revealed that overall response ratings for each implementation item resulted in favorable mean scores ranging from 3.00 to 3.40. Of the six questions, item four, *I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of the RTI*, had the highest implementation rating (M = 3.40, SD = .70). Low implementation ratings were received by item three regarding *teachers' knowledge of RTI* (M = 3.01), item five regarding *perception of RTI* effectiveness (M = 3.01),

and item six regarding *perception of RTI implementation success* (M = 3.00). Frequencies, means and standard deviations for items five and six had similar percentage responses. It can be implied that these two implementation items were not distinctively different in content resulting in similar descriptive data (participant's responses).

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics and Frequencies for Researcher-Created Questions regarding Teacher Perceptions towards RTI Implementation.

Question	N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1. I understand my role within the RTI process at my school.	363	8 (2%)	15 (4%)	183 (47%)	157 (40%)	3.35	.67
2. I understand the role of each RTI team member at my school.	363	8 (2%)	41 (11%)	189 (48%)	125 (32%)	3.19	.72
3. I believe that other teachers are knowledgeable of the RTI process in my school.	363	13 (3%)	57 (15%)	207 (53%)	86 (22%)	3.01	.73
4. I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of the RTI process at my school.	363	8 (2%)	22 (6%)	151 (39%)	182 (47%)	3.40	.70
5. I believe that the RTI process is effective at my school.	363	22 (6%)	52 (13%)	189 (49%)	100 (26%)	3.01	.81
6. I think that RTI implementation at my school is successful.	360	23 (6%)	51 (13%)	190 (49%)	96 (25%)	3.00	.82

Note: Implementation (IMP) scale – (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.

Results also indicated that each of the six-implementation items had a minimum sum of 75% to 87% of participants *Agree* or *Strongly Agree* with its statement (Table 14). Conversely, a minimum sum of 6% to 19% of participants *Disagreed* or *Strongly Disagreed* with each implementation statement (Table 14). Further analysis was conducted to determine the sub-group that dominated *disagree* and/or *strongly disagree* responses. Descriptive analysis was calculated

to determine frequencies for *disagree* and *strongly disagree* according to sub-groups within the demographic item of position held (Table 15).

As expected, general education teachers' frequencies lead the response areas of *disagree* and *strongly agree* regarding their perception of RTI implementation due to ratio of general education participating in the survey. What was unexpected is the number of counselors (3 out of 10) that responded to item #4 regarding principal's knowledge of RTI with *strongly disagree*. Demographic results indicated that 10 counselors participated in this research study. Therefore, 33% of counselors are represented in their response to item #4.

Table 15

Frequencies and Percentages of Disagree or Strongly Disagree Responses to Implementation by Position Held.

Question	Strongly Disagree			Disagree					
	N	Gen. Ed.	Other	N	Gen.Ed.	Sp.Ed.	Couns.	Psych	Other
1. I understand my role within the RTI process at my school.	8	8		15	15				
2. I understand the role of each RTI team member at my school.	8	8		41	34	1		1	5
3. I believe that other teachers are knowledgeable of the RTI process in my school.	13	13		57	46	2	1	1	7
4. I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of the RTI process at my school.	8	8		22	13	1	3		5
5. I believe that the RTI process is effective at my school.	22	20	2	52	45				7
6. I think that RTI implementation at my school is successful.	23	20	3	51	45				6

Findings for research question four. What is the relationship between principal's leadership practices and the state of RTI implementation as perceived by elementary teachers? Using composite scores for each of the 30 leadership practices and for the sub-scale of IMP = Implementation, a Pearson's *r* correlation analysis was conducted to address the third research sub-question. Statistical analysis indicated that all 30 practices within each sub-scale are positively and significantly associated, at the .01 level of significance to RTI implementation as perceived by elementary teachers (Table 16). The 30 itemized leadership practice means ranged from *M* = 6.74, SD = 2.94 - '*asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance'* to *M* = 8.59, SD = 2.05 – *'treats others with dignity and respect'*.

Strong positive relationships to RTI implementation were between the principal leadership practices of "builds a consensus around organizational values" – CTP (*r* = .602), "talks about future trends" – ISV (*r* = .617), "makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set" – EOA (*r* = .608), "actively listens to diverse points of view" – MTW (*r* = .613) and "ensures that people grow in their job" – MTW (*r* = .620). Results indicate that according to elementary teachers, the more frequently principals demonstrate each of the thirty leadership practices the more successful RTI implementation is within their school. However, there were no significant overall differences in correlations.

Table 16

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Itemized Principals' Leadership Practices of Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the Way and Encouraging the Heart toward Implementation (N=389)

Itemized Leadership Practices	Mean	SD	IMP
Challenge the Process Items			
1. Sets a personal example of what is expected.	7.58	2.52	.596**
6. Makes certain that people adhere to standards agreed upon.	7.97	2.36	.548**
11. Follows through on promises and commitments.	7.95	2.41	.591**
16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance.	6.74	2.94	.549**
21. Builds a consensus around organizational values.	7.43	2.56	.602**
26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership.	7.58	2.69	.577**
Inspire a Shared Vision Items			
2. Talks about future trends influencing work.	7.20	2.53	.617**
7. Describes a compelling image of the future.	7.03	2.64	.579**
12. Appeals to others to share a dream of the future.	7.22	2.66	.571**
17. Shows others how their interests can be realized.	6.92	2.69	.594**
22. Paints the "big picture" of group aspirations.	7.52	2.52	.586**
27. Speaks with conviction about the meaning of work.	7.56	2.71	.566**
Enable Others to Act Items			
3. Seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills.	6.90	2.61	.591**
8. Challenges people to try out new approaches.	7.44	2.55	.596**
13. Searches outside the organization for innovative ways to improve.	7.24	2.62	.525**
18. Asks "what can we learn?"	7.16	2.70	.537**
23. Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set.	7.76	2.51	.608**
28. Experiments and take risks.	6.84	2.75	.546**
Model the Way Items			
4. Develops cooperative relationships.	7.75	2.44	.598**
9. Actively listens to diverse points of view.	7.72	2.72	.613**
14. Treats others with dignity and respect.	8.59	2.05	.542**
19. Support the decisions that other people make.	8.12	2.23	.585**
24. Gives people a choice in deciding how to do their work.	7.63	2.50	.591**
29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs.	7.33	2.77	.620**
Encourage the Heart Items			
5. Praises people for a job well done.	7.76	2.58	.595**
10. Expresses confidence in other's abilities.	8.08	2.28	.566**
15. Creatively rewards people for their contributions.	7.09	2.75	.495**
20. Publicly recognizes people for commitment to shared values.	7.25	2.73	.536**
25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments.	7.04	2.81	.553**
30. Gives team-members appreciation and support.	7.69	2.67	.591**
Mean	7.56		3.2
Scale Min/Max Values	1 to 10		1 to 4

Note: *Leadership Practices scale* – (1) almost never, (2) rarely, (3) seldom, (4) once in a while, (5) occasionally, (6) sometimes, (7) fairly often, (8) usually, (9) very frequently, (10) always. *Implementation (IMP) scale* – (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.

** $p < .01$.

Further Analysis

Although the demographic items of *position held* and *Title I school* status were not determined as statistically significant predictors of principals' leadership practices, both the literature and the number of survey responses to each item incited further analysis regarding these two survey items. First, demographic results show that 45% of participants reported that counselors were the primary person in charge of RTI implementation (Table 5). Counselors, along with principals, are named as a member of schools' RTI problem-solving or data team. However, principals alone remain responsible for overseeing the coordination and maintenance of all school programs. Therefore, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine counselors' perceptions of principals' leadership practices.

Statistical analysis reveals that counselors' perceptions of principals' leadership practices (M = 7.10, n = 10) were somewhat lower than participants' (M = 7.56, n = 389) ratings of perceived PLP (Table 17). On the other hand, counselors' perceptions of RTI implementation (M = 3.37) was somewhat higher than participants' perceptions of implementation (M= 3.2). Results also reveal that three itemized practices within two sub-scales are positively and significantly associated, at the .05 level of significance to RTI implementation as perceived by counselors. Strong positive relationships to RTI implementation were between principals' practices of 1) "appeals to others to share a dream of the future" – ISV (r = .636*), 2) "seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills" – EOA (r = .659*), and 3) "challenges people to try out new approaches" – EOA (r = .666*). A summary of findings are presented in Table 18.

Table 17

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics from Counselors' Itemized Principals' Leadership Practices of Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the Way and Encouraging the Heart toward Implementation (N=10)

Itemized Leadership Practices	Counselors		
	Mean	SD	IMP
Challenge the Process Items			
1. Sets a personal example of what is expected.	7.40	3.13	.559
6. Makes certain that people adhere to standards agreed upon.	7.60	3.31	.525
11. Follows through on promises and commitments.	7.60	3.37	.488
16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance.	6.20	3.43	360
21. Builds a consensus around organizational values.	6.40	3.20	.477
26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership.	6.80	3.16	.487
Inspire a Shared Vision Items			
2. Talks about future trends influencing work.	6.60	3.10	.473
7. Describes a compelling image of the future.	6.50	3.14	.570
12. Appeals to others to share a dream of the future.	6.00	3.19	.636*
17. Shows others how their interests can be realized.	6.60	3.23	.318
22. Paints the "big picture" of group aspirations.	6.80	3.37	.541
27. Speaks with conviction about the meaning of work.	6.80	3.43	.579
Enable Others to Act Items			
3. Seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills.			
8. Challenges people to try out new approaches.	6.90	3.0	.659*
13. Searches outside the organization for innovative ways to improve.	7.00	3.56	.666*
18. Asks "what can we learn?"	6.60	3.17	.533
23. Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set.	6.30	2.98	.366
28. Experiments and take risks.	6.80	3.36	.577
	7.20	3.05	.566
Model the Way Items			
4. Develops cooperative relationships.	8.20	2.57	.149
9. Actively listens to diverse points of view.	7.20	3.46	.551
14. Treats others with dignity and respect.	8.90	2.51	.430
19. Support the decisions that other people make.	8.10	2.33	.361
24. Gives people a choice in deciding how to do their work.	7.60	3.24	.411
29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs.	7.10	2.96	.299
Encourage the Heart Items			
5. Praises people for a job well done.	8.50	2.80	.399
10. Expresses confidence in other's abilities.	8.30	2.71	.452
15. Creatively rewards people for their contributions.	5.60	3.60	.259
20. Publicly recognizes people for commitment to shared values.	7.50	3.14	.342
25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments.	6.30	3.43	.214
30. Gives team-members appreciation and support.	7.60	2.55	.190
Mean	7.10		3.37
Scale Min/Max Values	1 to 10		1 to 4

Note: Leadership Practices scale – (1) almost never, (2) rarely, (3) seldom, (4) once in a while, (5) occasionally, (6) sometimes, (7) fairly often, (8) usually, (9) very frequently, (10) always. Implementation (IMP) scale – (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree

* $p < .05$.

Demographic results also show that 310 (80%) of participants indicated Title I school status (Table 5). Therefore, further descriptive analysis was conducted to determine Title I school participants' perceptions of PLP and implementation (Table 18). Title I schools receive assistance through federal funds because a large percentage of their students are from low-income families. Restrictions on funding received by Title I schools prohibits them from using more than 15% of their allotment to support interventions for students without a disability (Sparks, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Data analysis of Title I schools revealed that participants' who were currently teaching within a Title I school (N=310), perceived that principals' leadership practices (M= 7.56, SD = 2.29) were similar (M = 7.52, SD = 2.17) to teachers who were not teaching (N= 53) within a Title I school (Table 19). There were no statistically significant differences between Title I and non-Title I schools' perceptions of PLP.

Table 18

Descriptive Statistics for Title I and Non-Title Schools Towards Principals' Leadership Practices

School	N	M	SD
1. Title I	310	7.56	2.29
2. Non-Title I	53	7.52	2.17
Scale Min/Max Values		1 to 10	

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Included in this chapter is a summary of the study and the results followed by a discussion of the findings. Additionally, based upon the data analysis, recommendations are made for professional practice and for future research studies.

Summary of the study

Each time a teacher interacts with his/her principal to discuss instructional goals or student progress; it is an opportunity for the teacher to observe the leadership practices of the principal. In the same way, teachers are the direct recipients and observers of principals' leadership practices as principals coordinate any school program or activity. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of principals' practices during the implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Principals are expected to answer the clarion call of implementing a tiered intervention model to support struggling learners and appropriately identify those with a learning disability. Without principal leadership, the success of the tiered process is unlikely. Principals, however, implement RTI without specific federal or state guidelines and, therefore, to the best of their knowledge.

Data for this quantitative study was collected using an online survey which was developed from the literature, modified, then field tested before distribution. Responses were archived using an online survey database and then downloaded into a statistical analysis program (SPSS). The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher perceptions of their principals' leadership practices during RTI implementation. The guiding research sub-questions were: 1) What is the relationship between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices towards RTI implementation?, 2) Given that significant

relationship is found between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices, what is the difference in the identified demographic variables?, 3) What is the relationship between principal's leadership practices categories and state of RTI implementation?, and 4) What is the relationship between itemized principal's leadership practices and the state of RTI implementation as perceived by elementary teachers? In response to research questions, data analysis was conducted according to deVaus' (2002) and Groves' et al., (2009) methods of survey analyses. Other significant research findings or trends are also reported.

Summary of research findings

For research question one: The frequency of RTI related principal-teacher interactions and a teacher's age are 1) associated with (correlation) and 2) are predictors of (regression) teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practices during RTI implementation.

For research question two: ANOVA results revealed that: 1) as the frequency of RTI-related principal-teacher exchanges increased so did that of teachers' ratings of perceived PLP. Statistically significant sub-groups differences in PLP were revealed among teachers that met with the principal once a month (M = 8.24), 2 – 3 times a month (M = 8.42), and 2 – 3 times a week (M = 8.46); and 2) counselors and psychologists had the most frequent interaction with principals regarding RTI at a minimum rate of *once a week.*

For research question three. A correlation analysis revealed that all five sub-scales (IV) are positively and significantly related to the state of RTI implementation (DV) as perceived by elementary teachers.

For research question four. A correlation analysis revealed that all 30 practices are positively and significantly associated with favorable perceptions of RTI implementation.

Discussion of research findings

In response to the overarching question, results from this study suggest that principals' practices during RTI implementation are successful as high scores on the LPI and on the six-implementation questions were revealed.

Research question one: **What is the relationship between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices towards RTI implementation?** According to the results, frequency of principal-teacher RTI-related interactions and the age of the teacher are statistically significant predictors of how teachers' perceive PLP during RTI implementation. This means that the more often principals meet with teachers about RTI or the older a teacher is, one could predict the greater or more favorable will be teachers' ratings of principals' leadership practices.

Principals are depended upon to create an environment that cultivates ongoing thorough discussions with teachers resulting in quality RTI professional learning and teacher self-efficacy (Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011). During these direct interactions with teachers, principals are able to hear from teachers any issues related to the intervention process as well as communicate their (principals') own expectations of teachers. It can be concluded, that as a result of these interactions, teachers' assign a positive meaning to their experience with or observation of principals' leadership practices. In his definition of leadership, Northouse (2010) defined leadership as 'a transactional event that occurs between the leader and the followers' (p.3). Therefore, several transactions occur as principals launch the implementation of RTI beginning with the establishment of academic or learning goals for students.

Additionally, over 50% of participants were between the ages of 35 to 54. Participants within this age range could be more knowledgeable of the teaching profession. Or, on the other

hand, participants may have resolved through his/her teaching experience an understanding of the variability of leadership. In short, this age range of participants could be more mature as they have experienced both life and varying forms and degrees of leadership thus, reporting more favorable ratings of PLP.

Research question two: **Given that a significant relationship is found between southeastern Georgia teachers' demographic variables and principals' leadership practices, what is the difference in the identified demographic variables?** Results indicate that there were no conclusive or statistically significant differences in the demographic variables of teachers' age and favorable ratings of teachers' perceptions of PLP during implementation (Table 12). The fact that there were no statistically significant differences found could be contributed to teachers being able to enter or exit the field at any age or at any stage of their professional career. Johnson and Kardos (2002) reported that for a cohort of new teachers, the beginning age within the group is that of a 22 year-old first year teachers and middle-aged career changers. Although the highest mean rating of principals' leadership practices was by the age group of 18-24 years (M=8.95, SD=1.10, n=4) it can be concluded that these four participants are novice teachers.

Moreover, teacher knowledge is critical within RTI process (Hall, 2008; Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Burns & Gibbons, 2008). Novice teachers have little knowledge of the components of RTI i.e., they have no premise or solid frame of reference to rely upon regarding the principal's leadership specific to RTI, hence the higher rating of PLP. Also, new teachers expect differently of the principal as a new hire when it comes to classroom visitations, period meetings, and feedback regarding instruction as they are learning both the profession and the model (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). Therefore, beginning teachers are often paired with

experienced teachers within the model (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

Data analysis however, revealed statistically significant differences in mean scores of PLP within the demographic item *frequency of principal-teacher RTI-related interactions*. Teachers that reported to have met with the principal once a month (M=8.24, n=93), 2-3 times a month (M=8.42, n=66) and 2-3 times a week (M=8.46, n=9) were the highest of six means. This finding is meaningful because differences in mean scores suggest that the greater the frequency of principal-teacher RTI interactions, the more positive teachers' perceptions are of principals' leadership practices. It can be implied that these RTI related interactions demonstrate principals' commitment to the tiered process. As the instructional leader, the principal is expected to continue to talk about RTI in both staff and grade-level meetings (Hall, 2008). By this, the principal promotes that the school's preventive efforts are far greater than other remediation methods such as retention. As a result, teachers begin to feel that their efforts are being recognized, valued and that they are supported.

As expected, demographic results revealed that 116 (48%) general education teachers reported to have met with their principal *less than once a month* in regards to the tiered process of interventions. This finding is meaningful and consistent with Hall (2008) and Bean and Lillenstein (2012). Hall (2008) noted that at a minimum of every three months, principals should have a data meeting with teachers to review student progress in a one-on-one setting. During this meeting, it is not just about RTI, but an extensive discussion regarding the student's sufficient rate of progress since tier entry. The teacher comes prepared with progress monitoring and/or assessment data, attendance history and other documentation or records that would contribute to a comprehensive discussion on student performance and towards making an informed decision on how to further assist both teacher and student. Since progress monitoring data takes a

minimum of six to eight weeks to accumulate, meeting any earlier with the principal may not provide the teacher with enough sufficient evidence of student growth. As a result, using student data, detailed conversations include intervention type, intensity, and group, tier movement, curriculum and administrative support.

RTI encounters can take place in a formal (i.e., staff meeting) setting or an informal (individualized encounters) manner (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). It is not the quantity of interactions alone that matters but also, the quality of the interaction. Therefore, through their own personal involvement in the model and how they interact with teachers during implementation, principals demonstrate, influence, and steer the direction of RTI.

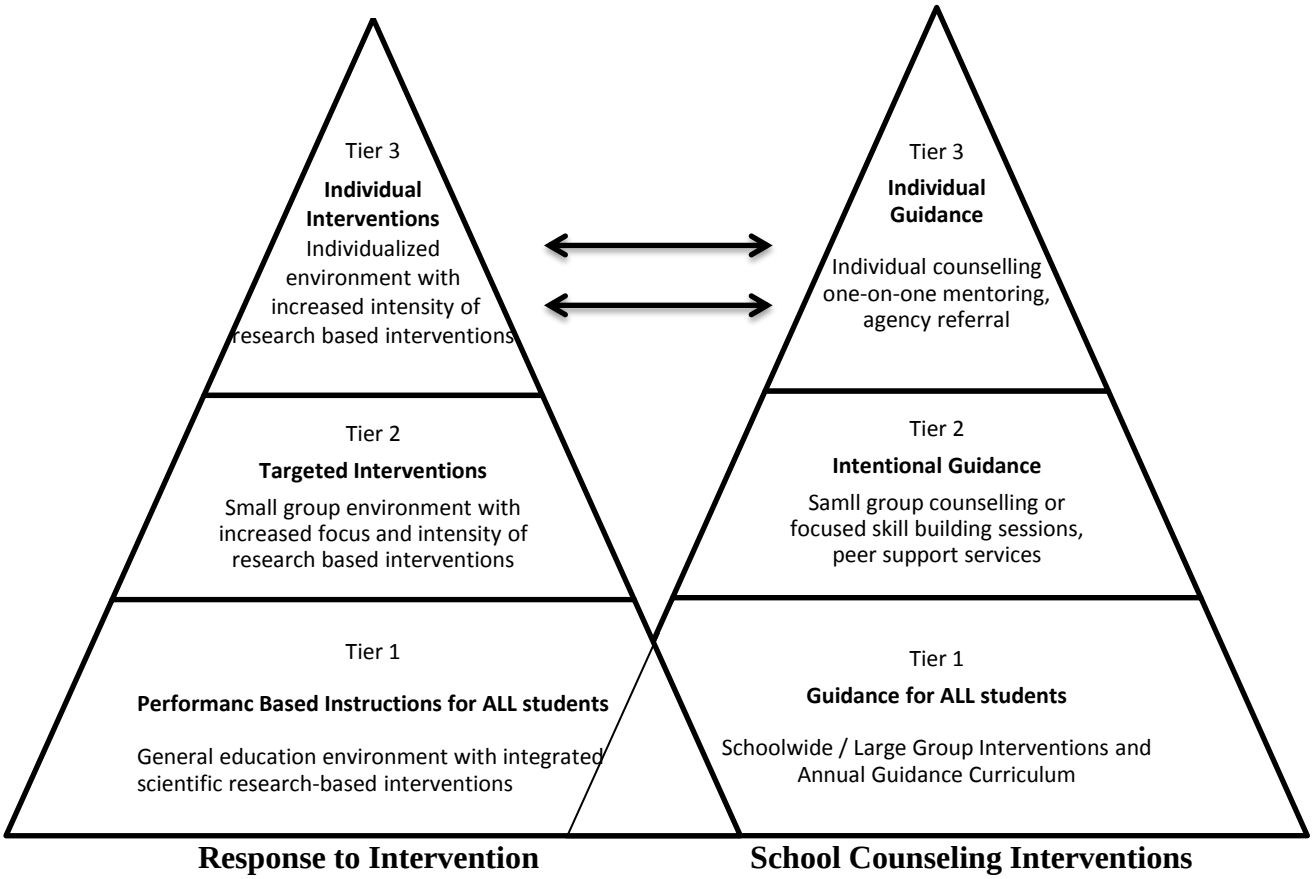
Further analysis of the demographic item *frequency of principal-teacher RTI-related interactions* revealed that at the rate of *2-3 times a week*, which had the highest mean score for PLP (M=8.46), was an outlier of nine (9) participant responses. Responses were given by 1-teacher, 3-counselors, 1-psychologist, and 4-other personnel holding varied positions. Although at the rate of *Daily*, the mean score for PLP was rated M=7.55, an outlier of eight (8) participants were revealed. For both groups, it could be assumed that they are members of the RTI team or have been assigned a critical role within the model. Although it is expected for principals to lead the RTI initiative and have reported that they do take the lead role in establishing the conditions and the climate of the model, they also understand that its implementation will involve a distribution of leadership (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Therefore, principals often delegate the coordination or ongoing management of the initiative to a teacher leader such as the school's literacy/reading coach, counselor, special education teacher or RTI coordinator and hence the outliers of eight and nine at the higher frequencies of *Daily* and *2-3 times a week*, respectively.

Demographic results showed that approximately 44.7% (177) of survey responses indicated *counselors* as the primary person *in charge of RTI implementation* within their school. This finding is in keeping with the above finding of counselors being the primary person who has the most frequent RTI related interactions with principals. It can be concluded that because counselors are the person in charge of the model, their interaction with the school's principal is often times comparable to other teaching personnel. This is because schools generally designate a reading coach or RTI coordinator to maintain the operation of the tiered model (Hall, 2008). On the other hand, some schools have their counselor coordinate the model because both the tiered structure of RTI and school counseling share the common goals of early intervention, prevention and advocacy (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011) (see Figure 4). And so, the role of the school counselor is continuously evolving as predicated by education reform (Ockerman, Mason & Hollenbeck, 2012). Having to work within the complexities of a progressive profession, the counselor's role is either determined by themselves, as they have a propensity to help or by the expectations of the principal.

Data analysis revealed that 1 of 3 (33%) psychologists indicated having met with the principal a minimum of *2-3 times a week.* Key components to implementation does not include administrative support and the establishment of a problem-solving team alone, but also, the determination of roles (Lembke, et.al., 2010). Psychologists have taken on the demands of RTI and have clearly defined their role as practitioners within the process (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007; Hawkins, Kroeger, Musti-Rao, Barnett, & Ward, 2008; Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007). This is because, in some districts, psychologists have a caseload that includes students from several different schools. They are not based or assigned to one school in

particular during the school year. Hence, the 1.8% (n=7) of psychologists indicated as lead coordinators of RTI within this study.

Figure 4: Commonalities of the tiered structures within RTI and School Counseling



(Ockerman, Mason & Hollenbeck, 2012).

Similarly, data analysis also revealed that 3 of 10 (33%) of counselors indicated having met with the principal a minimum of *2-3 times a week*. Unlike psychologists, counselors are assigned to one school and their rate of interaction with the principal is more significant as counselors are also named as the primary person in charge of implementation. These two factors may be indicative of counselors' ratings of implementation being more favorable than participants' (M=3.2 vs. M= 3.37) and counselors' ratings of principals' leadership practices during implementation being less favorable than participants (M=7.10 vs. M= 7.56) as well.

Counselors, however, have yet to differentiate their unique role within the model; just as there is currently a discrepancy in role definition within the counseling profession (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). For that reason, counselors by default are given additional leadership responsibilities via a school's implementation of RTI. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position on RTI (2008) stated:

> Professional school counselors are stakeholders in the development and implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. Professional school counselors align with the RTI process through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program designed to improve student achievement and behavior (p.37).

Within the RTI model, counselors are not only a member of the problem-solving team, but also assist school leadership in its efforts to improve student achievement. As highly skilled professionals in the areas of collaboration and coordination, counselors' role within RTI: 1) makes them more visible, and 2) encourages a much stronger connection between teachers and the counseling program (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011). Therefore, taken together, the linkage between RTI and the counseling program hinders the traditional counselor from working in isolation, instead, alongside the principal in a seamless yet impactful way.

An explanation for demographic outliers that indicated the special education teacher (1%) and the psychologist (2%) as the *person in charge of RTI*, could be participants work experience of referring to counselors and psychologists due to the capacity in which the principal use these personnel within the model. Although classroom teachers provide the initial interventions, other professionals get involved as intervention intensity increases. Other professionals include reading specialists, special education teachers, psychologists or other instructional assistants in an area of which they have been trained (Moore & Whitfield, 2009). Special education teachers and psychologists are experts in the field of student learning and disabilities. Therefore, teachers often refer to these professionals for assistance when confronted with a student who has shown

little or no progress after general instruction. Often times, it is a comfort to teachers knowing that there is an interventionist that they can turn to for help (Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & McKenna, 2012).

Survey responses indicating principals (n= 77; 20%) as the *person in charge of RTI* could be the result of teachers thinking of their principal as the instructional or building leader. From day-to-day, principals are responsible for overseeing all of the school's academic, extra-curricular and community programs. This responsibility of principals, therefore, also includes the school-wide implementation of an RTI model, hence survey responses.

Research question three: What is the relationship between the five principal leadership practices categories and the state of RTI implementation? Data analysis revealed that all five leadership categories, which include the 30 leadership practice items, are positively and significantly associated with RTI implementation. Teachers' perceptions of how often principals display leadership practices in regards to RTI implementation were indicated by mean ratings that ranged from 7.3 (fairly often) to 7.9 (usually). It can be concluded that teachers' high ratings of principal leadership specific to RTI is a reflection of teachers' positive perception of or satisfaction with the state of RTI implementation.

Correlation coefficients for the five categorical practices ranged from substantial (r = .59*) to strong (r = .63*) associations with RTI *implementation* (deVaus, 2002). Within this same analysis, teachers' perception of RTI implementation had an overall mean of 3.2 (agree). Similar to the finding above, teachers' high rating of principals' RTI leadership practices within each of the five sub-scales is an indicator of teachers' positive perception of implementation. This finding is critical to school leadership because the literature described how principal leadership permeates all aspects of RTI implementation (White, et.al., 2012) and is a predictor

of how successful a school is in reaching their goal (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). How principals allocate their time, complete tasks, function in their role and the extent of their involvement is indicative of their leadership and has some bearing on a school's success (Camburn, Spillane, & Sebastian, 2010).

Statistical analysis revealed that southeastern Georgia elementary teachers perceive that principals *fairly often* (7) to *usually* (8) demonstrate the leadership practices of challenge the process (M = 7.6), inspire a shared vision (M = 7.3), enable others to act on that vision (M = 7.3), model the way (M = 7.9) and encourage teachers' heart (M = 7.6), throughout the implementation of RTI. The literature defines these five exemplary leadership practices and states how these practices influence teachers and give a school a sense of direction (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Leithwood, et.al., 1999). The first exemplary practice - *model the way* (*M* = 7.9), is for principals to provide direction for the school. At the beginning of any project, the leader is to give clear instructions, share the goal with all participants and demonstrate behaviors that are in keeping with the goal. Spiegel (2009) noted that direction included the principal as participating in the RTI process as well as monitoring instruction and supporting teachers by providing time and resources relative to RTI.

A second exemplary practice is that principals share a vision for the new program and its positive outcomes - *inspire a shared vision* (*M* = 7.3). Other schools' stories of success or student success within the building could be used. As a visionary, the principal describes all of the program's potential benefits as well as listen to any suggestions or concerns. During this time of open communication between teachers and principals, a restructuring of systems or roles may take place in order to help meet the school's goal.

A third exemplary leadership practice - *challenge the process* (*M* = 7.6), is the principal's willingness to take risks or enter into the unknown without the certainty of positive results. As the principal explore unfamiliar territory regarding new projects or programs, their approach or creative strategies may be viewed as risk-taking. Nevertheless, the principal does so with the intentions of improving student success.

A fourth exemplary leadership practice - *enable others to act on that vision* (*M* = 7.3), is principals' support which is often viewed as professional development (Leithwood & Mcadie, 2007; Marzano, et al., 2005). Nunn and Jantz (2009) stated that after five one-day RTI trainings that took place during the course of one year, teachers reported having higher levels of self-efficacy. Goodman and Webb (2006) stated that teachers needed both training and follow-up. Professional development in the literature was not only for teachers but, for principals as well. As principals coordinate school-wide programs, their recognition of their own need for PD is important. As a result, principals are to engage in rich professional discussions with teachers about new instructional strategies and resources to enhance their knowledge as well as support teachers in an effort to move the school's program forward.

The act of motivating teachers - *encourage teachers' heart* (*M* = 7.6), is the fifth exemplary leadership practice discussed in the literature. Principals can motivate teachers by praising or rewarding their efforts. This recognition could be a result of teachers sharing information or strategies with other teachers or for providing interventions that attributed to student progress (Kouzes & Posner). As principals openly praise their teachers, teacher engagement is increased (Tartar, Bliss & Hoy, 1989).

Given the limited availability of best practices for principal leadership during RTI implementation within the ISLLC standards, Georgia Leadership Keys and Georgia's RTI

manual, teachers' ratings of principals' practices are a commendation of their principals' leadership. However, principals understand that as their leadership responsibilities increase, their own need for additional professional development, for example, based on the ISLLC standards have increased as well (Spanneut, Tobin, and Ayers, 2012). In a study of 144 principals, 59% (77) were at the elementary level of Pre-K to grade 6. Over 70% (54) of the elementary principals reported a high to moderate need within two functions of ISLLC standard II which emphasizes student success through the sustainment of school culture and instructional programs. Principals indication of a high to moderate need for PD in the two ISLLC functions (Item 10 – Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress and Item 12 - Maximize time spent on quality instruction) communicates that elementary "principals are focused on instruction and monitoring their students' progress" which includes the implementation of RTI (Spanneut, Tobin, and Ayers, 2012, p.79).

Based on results from each of the six-implementation items having a minimum sum of 75% to 87% of participants Agree or Strongly Agree with its statement, it can be concluded that the more teachers interact with their principal, the more favorable teachers are towards PLP and the more teachers find the RTI process effective (Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011) (Table 14). Similarly, Robinson, et al., (2008) reported that as leaders and members interact, it is the leaders' behaviors that engage and inspire the staff to new levels of commitment. It is the frequency of RTI principal-teacher exchanges that reveals the principal's willingness to provide leadership by giving constructive feedback and support. So, the more frequently principals discuss with teachers 1) the status of students' progress, 2) the effectiveness of interventions, and 3) the usefulness of resources/materials, the more opportunities are there for principals to demonstrate their practices. As a result, these encounters influence teachers' perceptions about

PLP and the implementation of their intervention model.

Robinson, et al., (2008) stated that there must be a consensus on what the expectations are within the school community to meet learning goals. At times, to form a consensus, the principal and teachers are challenged to look beyond their familiar practices and embrace the unfamiliar. Also, principals enable others to act on the vision for RTI and encourage teachers' heart during the transactional occurrence of shared leadership and professional development. Burns and Gibbons (2008) state that most teachers have the basic knowledge and skills needed to implement RTI. However, professional learning is necessary to ensure a commonality among practitioners in language, understanding and goals. When teachers and principals work together to institute, coordinate and review an instructional program, student achievement improves (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011).

Once teachers know the direction of the school, they feel empowered to make decisions as they work to meet school goals. During times of collaboration, principals both listen and communicate clearly the emphasized goals to students and teachers so that there is no "gulf" between expected instructional practices and the goals that are being "stimulated, encouraged and promoted" by the leader (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Giving teachers a clearer sense of how an RTI model will benefit a school is the how principals inspire a shared vision. Rinaldi, Averill, and Stuart (2011) suggested in their work that the implementation of a tiered process within a school is more likely to succeed with administrative support, hence, the occurrence of modeling the way during RTI implementation.

Data analysis revealed that 6% to 19% of participants *Disagreed (D) or Strongly Disagreed* (SD) with one or more of the six-implementation items. Although collectively, the six-implementation items had a minimum of 75% of participants indicate *Agree or Strongly*

Agree for each statement. Further analysis was conducted to identify the demographic sub-group within *position held* that constituted the 6% to 19% of the data responses. The researcher expected general education teachers to lead both response categories of *D* and *SD* because general education teachers are: 1) the primary recipients of principal leadership practices , 2) the primary administrators of interventions, and 3) made up 62% (n=243) of the sample.

What was unexpected, however, was the number of counselors (i.e., 3 out of 10) that *disagreed* with *implementation* item #4 - *principal's knowledge of RTI*. Principals reported that after establishing RTI in their school, it was understood that they would later be on the 'sidelines' throughout implementation (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012, p.498). This meant that the principal would promote the initiative and review data as an accountability tool. Then, through shared leadership, allow teacher-teams to make instructional decisions using RTI goals as their guide. As a result, it would typically be the literacy coach, special education teacher, or the counselors who assume the role of RTI coordinator within the teacher-teams. The RTI coordinator, in this case the counselor, becomes more knowledgeable of teacher's concerns, students' progress and the many intricacies of the model. Considering that 45% of participants in this study indicated that counselors are the primary person in charge of RTI, and that counselors meet frequently with principals above any other school personnel, it could be implied that counselors work closely with principals throughout implementation. During these principal-counselor exchanges, the counselor may be learning of the principals' level of RTI knowledge or lack thereof. Clemens, Milsom, and Cashwell (2009) encourage counselors to foster a high-quality relationship with their principal by either consulting with or informing their principal on a regular basis.

Principal leadership is emphasized as critical to RTI implementation (Lembke, et.al., 2010). It can be concluded that as principals *challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act on that vision, model the way and encourage teachers' heart*, then *implementation* will be positively affected. Results imply that successful implementation is the product of teachers being able to frequently interact with their principal during times of shared decision making or as rich discussions on student progress continue. Rinaldi, Averill, and Stuart (2011) reported that careful RTI planning and collaboration between principal and teachers contributed to meeting the specific needs of their school's student community. As principals exhibit the practices stated within the LPI, teachers may perceive that their schools' implementation of the tiered intervention process is fulfilling its purpose.

Research question four: What is the relationship between itemized principal's leadership practices and the state of RTI implementation? Statistical analysis revealed that all 30 leadership practices are positively and significantly associated, at the .01 level of significance to RTI implementation as perceived by elementary teachers. Strong positive relationships to RTI implementation were between the individual principal leadership practices of "builds a consensus around organizational values" – CTP (r = .602), "talks about future trends" – ISV (r = .617), "makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set" – EOA (r = .608), "actively listens to diverse points of view" – MTW (r = .613) and "ensures that people grow in their job" – MTW (r = .620). Though all 30 perceived PLP are strongly related to implementation, none are named within the Georgia RTI manual, the ISLLC standards or Georgia Leader Keys manual as best practices for principals to use during implementation. If principals are encouraged to use these guidebooks/tools or because these guidebooks/tools were created for principal leadership and with RTI being a major part of improving student

achievement, then leadership practices specific to RTI implementation should be found within each document.

Out of the 30 PLP items, one item alone had the highest mean rating of 8.59 (r = .542*, n=389) -*'treats others with dignity and respect'* (Table 16). Equally, data analysis revealed that *'treats others with dignity and respect'* received the highest mean score of 8.90 (n=10) among *counselors* as well (Table 17). Exercising respect for teachers and their input is named first of three critical components to leadership within the RTI model (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Teachers would rather have the autonomy to provide instruction for students with few dictates from principals along the way. Northouse (2010) also named respect first among five principles of ethical leadership. Principals are recommended to give credence to what teachers understand to be the best instructional decision (such as, in this study, tier movement or tier interventions) for their students by listening to teacher ideas and individual teacher goals. Decisions may then be made within a team or with the guidance of a teacher expert or teacher leader. Principals are to be comfortable, to say the least, with the amount of autonomy teachers are granted, but, a range of instructional strategies ought to be welcomed (Hoerr, 2013). Not only is it the decision exclusively that incites respect from principals towards teachers, but also teachers' exhibition of competency and repetition of quality performance thereafter.

Data analysis revealed that of the six-implementation questions, #4 - *I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of RTI* had the highest mean rating (M=3.40, SD = .70). As stated in the literature, principals' leadership practices are influenced by national and state leadership guidelines. Therefore, it can be determined that the five leadership practices are embedded (not specified) within the six ISLLC standards, the 10 Georgia Leadership Keys and Georgia's RTI manual. For Georgia principals, the Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions manual does

not provide best practices for principals, but lists six responsibilities of the principal during implementation. An alternative perspective is that these six elements are what to do to implement RTI and the 30 LPI items describe how to implement.

There were no overall significant differences in correlations for each of the 30 leadership practice items and implementation. Several factors could be attributed to this detail. First, the close similarity/overlapping resemblance of the 30 leadership practice items' context within the survey instrument. When participants had read the survey questions, it is conceivable that questions were not uniquely interpreted as the researcher had anticipated. Secondly, because principals are the building leaders, participants have the tendency to mentally consider the principal's influence with/without the principal being named specifically in survey items. Moreover, respondents may use their daily interactions with various school personnel as a frame of reference when replying to survey questions which is not what the researcher anticipated. In fact, rather than considering the principal, participants may have reflected on the last RTI encounter with a colleague and the outcome status of that particular encounter and used that experience to indicate a response.

Based on results, most teachers 340 (92%) *agreed that their principal was knowledgeable of the RTI process*. As teachers provide instruction within the general education classroom and identify students that are in need of additional support, it is expected of the principal to understand the tiered intervention process as he/she is looked upon for guidance. Hilton (2007) stated that there is a need for principals to provide leadership during RTI because principals are named as a critical component to the successful implementation and sustainment of the model. In the RTI guide by the Institute of Educational Science (2009) as well as in research by Burns, et al., (2008), the principal is recommended as the first essential person to lead the initiative.

Other Findings

Demographic results revealed that 310 (80%) of participating schools reported to being a Title I school (Table 6). Since RTI is not a specialized program, schools are only allowed to use 15% of their federal funding on the program (Sparks, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Combined with the results that 92% of participants perceive that principals are knowledgeable of RTI and that overall perceptions of principals' leadership practices and implementation received a mean rating of 7.56 and 3.2 respectively, it can be determined that principals' RTI efforts are noteworthy considering the limited budget. Hall (2008) stated that implementing the model is inexpensive as the hiring of new staff and the purchasing of materials is not the crux of implementation. What is essential is the refocusing of staff and materials. And, if staff and materials are needed, both can be obtained without harming a school's budget. Nevertheless, principals in southeastern Georgia have displayed remarkable leadership practices within a model that has budgetary constraints.

With RTI, schools are able to address students' academic and behavioral deficits. An alternative perspective could be that lack of student progress could be viewed as an indicator of a weak RTI process. Although not the focus of this study or findings therein, weaknesses in a school's RTI model hence, an inadequacy in meeting student needs could be due to lack of funding to sustain the necessary components of RTI implementation. Therefore, schools/school districts should be able to request implementation assistance or increased aid to enhance the quality of support provided to students.

Federal and state guidelines are available to principals to assist them in their role as leaders of RTI. The six ISLLC standards have been used often to enhance principal leadership (Brumley, 2010). As principals implement an RTI model within their building, they are to do so

within the parameters of the ISLLC standards. In short, the ISLLC standards calls for the principal to: 1) have a vision, 2) promote learning and PD, 3) manage school operations and safety, 4) collaborate with stakeholders and mobilize resources, 5) exercise integrity and be ethical and 6) understand and respond to political, legal and cultural contexts (ISLLC, 2008). Particularly, Georgia principals use its Leader Keys as a guide to improving the teaching and learning process within their schools. As indicated in its rubric, Georgia's Leader Keys are aligned to the six ISLLC standards. The Leader Keys lists performance expectations of principals within each of its ten strands which are: Curriculum, Assessment, Standards-Based Instruction, Data Analysis, Organizational Culture, Professional Learning and Development, Performance Management and Process Improvement, Managing Operations, Leading Change, and Relationship Development (GADOE, 2011). Labeled the 'building-level leader', the Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions manual details the role and responsibility of a principal during RTI implementation. The Georgia RTI manual lists the following as the role of the principal: 1) implement RTI, including plan for progress monitoring, 2) focus on assessment as driving instruction, 3) develop staff understanding of RTI, 4) provide RTI time for interventions, 5) ensure Tier I interventions occur school wide, and 6) establish protocols for Tier 2 support (GADOE RTI, 2008). Additionally, a website search during data analysis produced another guide that provides principals with tools to effectively implement the model. This blueprint for RTI implementation identifies 1) the critical components for implementation, 2) resources and 3) advice from RTI experts (NASDSE, 2008).

Recommendations for Practice

Coordinating a school-wide program like RTI will require a collaborative effort from all administrators, teachers and staff members within a school. Many states as well as districts, take

a different approach to RTI, hence the variation in models and the primary person in charge of RTI. Using the results reported within this study, recommendations for educational practice are presented.

Results demonstrated that the more principals have RTI-related teacher exchanges, the more positive the perception of PLP. Although a total of 153 (42%) of survey participants reported that they meet with principals *less than once a month*, principal practices were rated a high mean score of 7.56 and implementation a satisfactory mean of 3.2. Therefore, a first recommendation for principal is to be sure to meet consistently with teachers at the recommended rate of every three months to engage in specific one-on-one discussions about the tiered process and individual student progress (Hall, 2008).

Another recommendation is that principals and counselors should be sure to have ongoing interactions regarding RTI and student progress as 48% were reported to be the primary coordinators of RTI implementation. The implementation of an RTI model is a collaborative effort to improving student achievement. Therefore, it requires a dynamic collaboration among professionals who shares their expertise, set goals, problem solve and makes instructional decisions. As the primary person in charge of RTI, counselors have a unique opportunity for school leadership (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011). In addition to being an advocate of early intervention within their professional program, an RTI model increases the opportunity for counselors to provide early interventions, as well as interact with teachers and parents (Ryan, et al., 2011). If this is the case within other Georgia school districts, then principals should know that school counselors are not only an essential role within the leadership team of a school, but within the RTI process as well and ensure the provision of ongoing support. Conversely, counselors should be sure to provide up-to-date information with principals about the status of

RTI and students' progress that are within the process.

Presented in this study are trends and significant findings from survey responses and data analysis. Findings generated from the quantitative analysis would benefit current and soon-to-be principals as they coordinate the implementation of an RTI model but, other educational initiatives as well. Findings may assist teachers and other certified personnel in their role and ultimately positively enhance all students' academic and behavioral progress that are in Tiers 2, 3 and 4, as teachers are members of the RTI process and/or problem-solving team

Principal leadership is a phenomenon that is practiced by administrators and experienced by teachers (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Though the RTI framework promises improved student academic and behavioral achievement, principal leadership is naturally expected. Whether principals are intentional or not regarding their practices throughout RTI implementation, teachers consider the leader's role to be directly associated to the model's success or failure. Knowing this, specific guidance should be provided for 'building-level' leaders at the initial stages of planning and ongoing implementation of any educational initiative.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since variations exist concerning lead implementer of RTI within schools, there continues to be ambiguity in practice. Though principals are ultimately responsible for a school's success, they are not the primary coordinator the model. More exploration of principals as lead implementer is needed to enhance principals' position as the instructional leader and overseer of all of the school's activities and goals.

A strength of this study is the investigation of elementary principals' practices specific to RTI implementation within a particular region. However, questions from other educational researchers could probe the practices of principals' and produce a more in depth study on

principal leadership that is either quantitative or qualitative in design. Recommendations for future research may include:

1) Reproduce this current study beyond the boundaries of southeastern Georgia. Schools districts across the state could be invited to participate targeting a larger population. This strategy would decrease any potential biases or errors in analysis.

2) Reproduce this current study but, design all survey demographic items so that responses are able to be included in data analysis or do not result in statistical error.

3) Reproduce this current study but, include a qualitative component to the research design. Since correlations within this study are not distinctively different as their r -values range from a .59 to a .65, it could be concluded that:

   a) the instrument does not make a clear distinguish between practices.
   b) individuals did not think carefully about the survey items or take the time to think about them; and
   c) the responses within one practice could predict the value of other practices within the instrument.

A future study could avoid these mentioned above by including participant commentary within its research design. Teacher statements would contribute to a more in depth analysis to the data regarding teacher perceptions.

4) Reproduce this current study but, include student assessment data. Student assessment data would give a more defined view of implementation success. An analysis of teacher survey responses could be correlated to student data.

5) Reproduce this current study examining school counselors' leadership practices

within the RTI process. This would eliminate in any bias in survey responses as there are varying models of RTI implementation throughout the state and within school districts in Georgia.

Dissemination

Findings revealed in this study are specific to principals in southeastern Georgia school districts. Teacher perceptions may be generalized to other elementary schools and principals beyond the districts that participated. The results of this study will be shared with the larger learning community by presenting in state/regional conferences.

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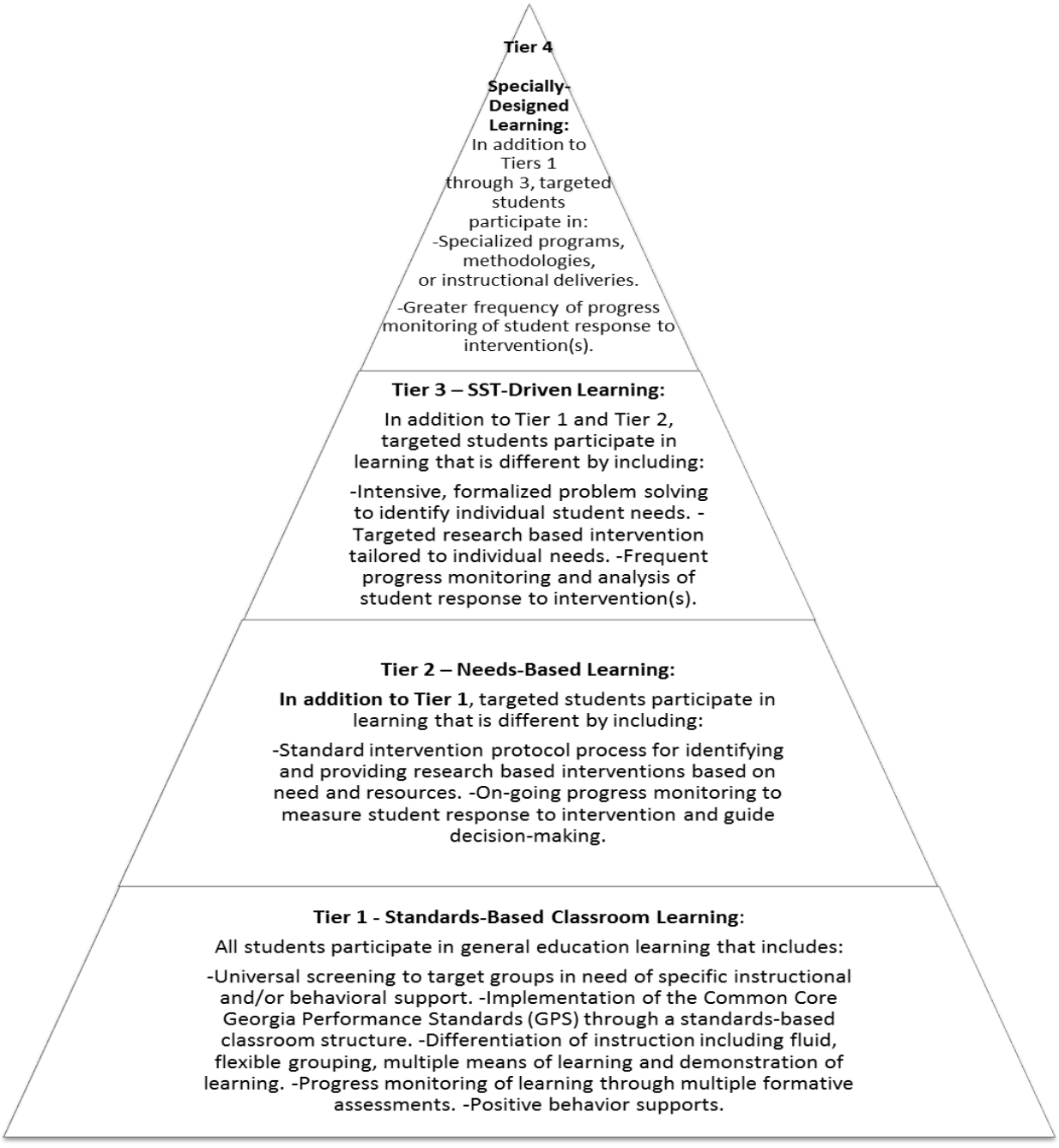
APPENDIX A

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION:

THE GEORGIA STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PYRAMID OF INTERVETIONS



APPENDIX B

THE SIX ISLLC STANDARDS AND THE 31 FUNCTIONS

STANDARD I

An educational leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.

Functions:

1. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision of learning
2. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning
3. Create and implement plans to achieve goals
4. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement
5. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans

STANDARD II

An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Functions:

6. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations
7. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program
8. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students
9. Supervise instruction
10. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress
11. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff
12. Maximize time spent on quality instruction
13. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning
14. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program

STANDARD III

An educational leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Functions:

15. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems
16. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources
17. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff

18. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership
19. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning

STANDARD IV
An educational leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Functions:
20. Collect and analyze data and information peRTInent to the educational environment
21. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources
22. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers
23. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners

STANDARD V
An educational leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Functions:
24. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success
25. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior
26. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity
27. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision making
28. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling

STANDARD VI
An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.

Functions:
29. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers
30. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning
31. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives to adapt (CCSSO, 2008).

APPENDIX C

KOUZES AND POSNER'S LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY (LPI) (2002)

Rating Scale:

1=almost never	2=rarely	3=seldom	4=once in a while	5=occasionally
6=sometimes	7=fairly often	8=usually	9=very frequently	10=always

1. Sets a personal example of what is expected.
2. Talks about future trends influencing work.
3. Seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills.
4. Develops cooperative relationships.
5. Praises people for a job well done.
6. Makes certain that people adhere to standards agreed upon.
7. Describes a compelling image of the future.
8. Challenges people to try out new approaches.
9. Actively listens to diverse points of view.
10. Expresses confidence in other's abilities.
11. Follows through on promises and commitments.
12. Appeals to others to share a dream of the future.
13. Searches outside the organization for innovative ways to improve.
14. Treats others with dignity and respect.
15. Creatively rewards people for their contributions.
16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance.
17. Shows others how their interests can be realized.
18. Asks "what can we learn?"
19. Support the decisions that other people make.
20. Publicly recognizes people for commitment to shared values.
21. Builds a consensus around organizational values.
22. Paints the "big picture" of group aspirations.
23. Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set.
24. Gives people a choice in deciding how to do their work.
25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments.
26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership.
27. Speaks with conviction about the meaning of work.
28. Experiments and take risks.
29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs.
30. Gives team-members appreciation and support.

APPENDIX D

AN ADAPTATION OF KOUZES AND POSNER'S ORIGINAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY (2002)

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each statement carefully and assess to what extent you/your current principal **emphasizes the following behaviors in regards to the RTI process** in your school. Do not consider effectiveness of interventions, support personnel, other materials and/or resources. Choose the response number that best applies to each statement and record it in the box to the right of the statement.

Rating Scale:

1=almost never	2=rarely	3=seldom	4=once in a while	5=occasionally
6=sometimes	7=fairly often	8=usually	9=very frequently	10=always

1. Sets a personal example of what is expected of teachers regarding RTI implementation.
2. Talks about future trends influencing work in regards to RTI implementation.
3. Seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills in regards to RTI implementation.
4. Develops cooperative relationships during RTI implementation.
5. Praises people for a job well done in regards to RTI implementation.
6. Makes certain that people adhere to standards agreed upon in regard to RTI implementation.
7. Describes a compelling image of the future regarding RTI implementation.
8. Challenges people to try out new approaches during RTI implementation.
9. Actively listens to diverse points of view regarding RTI implementation.
10. Expresses confidence in other's abilities regarding RTI implementation.
11. Follows through on promises and commitments regarding RTI implementation.
12. Appeals to others to share a dream of the future regarding RTI implementation.
13. Searches outside the organization for innovative ways to improve RTI implementation.
14. Treats others with dignity and respect during RTI implementation.
15. Creatively rewards people for their contributions during RTI implementation.

16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance during RTI implementation.
17. Shows others how their interests can be realized in regards to RTI implementation.
18. Asks "what can we learn?" during RTI implementation.
19. Support the decisions that other people make in regard to RTI implementation.
20. Publicly recognizes people for commitment to shared values in regard to RTI implementation.
21. Builds a consensus around organizational values during RTI implementation.
22. Paints the "big picture" of group aspirations during RTI implementation.
23. Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set in regard to RTI implementation.
24. Gives people a choice in deciding how to do their work in regard to RTI implementation.
25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments during RTI implementation.
26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership during RTI implementation.
27. Speaks with conviction about the meaning of work during RTI implementation.
28. Experiments and take risks during RTI implementation.
29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs in regard to RTI implementation.
30. Gives team-members appreciation and support during RTI implementation.

APPENDIX E

THE SIX LPI STATEMENTS FOR EACH EXEMPLARY PRACTICE

Exemplary PRACTICE	SIX STATEMENTS
Challenging the Process	1. Sets a personal example of what is expected. 6. Makes certain that people adhere to standards agreed upon. 11. Follows through on promises and commitments. 16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect people's performance. 21. Builds a consensus around organizational values. 26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership.
Inspiring a Shared Vision	2. Talks about future trends influencing work. 7. Describes a compelling image of the future. 12. Appeals to others to share a dream of the future. 17. Shows others how their interests can be realized. 22. Paints the "big picture" of group aspirations. 27. Speaks with conviction about the meaning of work.
Enabling Others to Act	3. Seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills. 8. Challenges people to try out new approaches. 13. Searches outside the organization for innovative ways to improve. 18. Asks "what can we learn?" 23. Makes certain that goals, plans, and milestones are set. 28. Experiments and take risks.
Modeling the Way	4. Develops cooperative relationships. 9. Actively listens to diverse points of view. 14. Treats others with dignity and respect. 19. Support the decisions that other people make. 24. Gives people a choice in deciding how to do their work. 29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs.
Encouraging the Heart	5. Praises people for a job well done. 10. Expresses confidence in other's abilities. 15. Creatively rewards people for their contributions. 20. Publicly recognizes people for commitment to shared values. 25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments. 30. Gives team-members appreciation and support.

APPENDIX F

GUIDE FOR COLLECTING PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

Teachers will rank their principals' leadership practice for each behavior item within the LPI. A total will then calculated for each practice.

CTP **Challenge** the Process	**ISV** **Inspire** a Shared Vision	**EOA** **Enable** Others to Act	**MTW** **Model** the Way	**ETH** **Encourage** the Heart
TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL

APPENDIX G

APPROVED LPI LETTER

JOSSEY-BASS™
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News

March 26, 2012

Oatanisha Dawson
571 Freedom Trail
Brunswick, GA 31525

Dear Ms. Dawson:

Thank you for your request to use the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) in your dissertation. We are willing to allow you to ***reproduce*** the instrument in written form, as outlined in your request, at no charge. If you prefer to use our electronic distribution of the LPI (vs. making copies of the print materials) you will need to separately contact Lisa Shannon (lshannon@wiley.com) directly for instructions and payment. Permission to use either the written or electronic versions requires the following agreement:

(1) That the LPI is used only for research purposes and is not sold or used in conjunction with any compensated management development activities;
(2) That copyright of the LPI, or any derivation of the instrument, is retained by Kouzes Posner International, and that the following copyright statement is included on all copies of the instrument; "Copyright 8 2003 James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. All rights reserved. Used with permission",
(3) That one (1) **electronic** copy of your dissertation and one (1) copy of all papers, reports, articles, and the like which make use of the LPI data be sent **promptly** to our attention; and,
(4) That you agree to allow us to include an abstract of your study and any other published papers utilizing the LPI on our various websites.

If the terms outlined above are acceptable, would you indicate so by signing one (1) copy of this letter and returning it to me either via email or by post to; 1548 Camino Monde San Jose, CA 95125. Best wishes for every success with your research project.

Cordially,

Ellen Peterson
Permissions Editor
Epeterson4@gmail.com

I understand and agree to abide by these conditions:

(Signed) Oatanisha Dawson Date: March 24, 2012

Expected Date of Completion is: May 2013

WILEY 989 Market Street, Fifth Floor • San Francisco, CA 94103-1741

APPENDIX H

THE STATE OF RTI IMPLEMENTATION IN MY SCHOOL

Instructions: Please indicate how much you agree with each of the six questions below.

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. I understand my role within the RTI process at my school.	1	2	3	4
2. I understand the role of each RTI team member at my school.	1	2	3	4
3. I believe that other teachers are knowledgeable of the RTI process in my school.	1	2	3	4
4. I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of the RTI process at my school.	1	2	3	4
5. I believe that the RTI process is effective at my school.	1	2	3	4
6. I think that RTI implementation at my school is successful.	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX I

REFERENCES USED TO CREATE RESEARCHER QUESTIONS

Researcher-created question	Reference
1. I understand my role within the RTI process at my school. 2. I understand the role of each RTI team member at my school.	Roles and responsibilities of leaders and team members are noted in the Georgia student achievement pyramid of interventions document (GADOE, 2011).
3. I believe that other teachers are knowledgeable of the RTI process in my school.	As schools implement RTI model, school personnel should have adequate professional development to "assure common understanding, language and goals of implementation" (Burns & Gibbons, 2008, p.10; Torgesen, et al., 2007, p.11).
4. I believe that the principal is knowledgeable of the RTI process at my school.	Guides for implementation and explanation are developed to ensure building-level administrators', in this case principals, knowledge and support of the model (GADOE, 2011; NASDSE, 2006; NJCLD, 2005; Hilton, 2007). During these walkthroughs and meeting times, principals can ensure the reliability of RTI implementation within classrooms (Kashima, et al., 2009; Reutebuch, 2008). These interactions help principals and teachers to become more knowledgeable of the RTI process, encourage shared decision-making, and positively influence planning an implementation (White, et al., 2012). For example, principals are then able to allocate time, materials, professional development and personnel to more efficiently provide interventions at all tier levels in support of the program (Hoover & Love, 2011; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Marzano, et al., 2005).
5. I believe that the RTI process is effective at my school.	With support from administrators, time to problem-solve, and implement interventions teachers find the RTI process effective (Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2010).
6. RTI implementation at my school is successful.	With teacher buy-in and support, the likelihood of successful RTI implementation is increased (Fixsen, et al., 2005). As leaders interact with members they exhibit behaviors that engage and inspire staff to new levels of commitment and purpose (Robinson, et al., 2008). As students make progress, principals' support and celebrate teachers' hard work as this motivating to all (Torgesen, 2007, p. 24).

APPENDIX J

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Elementary Principals and Elementary Teachers,

As part of the research requirement for my doctoral dissertation at Georgia Southern University under the direction of Dr. Hsiu-Lien Lu, I invite you to take a brief online survey.

Currently, as an elementary Assistant Principal and former math teacher, I would like to know what leadership practices are emphasized by principals during Response to Intervention (RTI) that contributes to its success.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine what leadership practices are emphasized by elementary principals during implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model as perceived by teachers. There is no wrong answer only what you perceive as evident regarding the frequency of observed practices.

This voluntary survey can be completed in approximately 7 minutes. All data are anonymous and cannot be linked to school, principal or teacher. Also, you may exit the survey at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact me, oatanisha_r_dawson@GeorgiSouthern.edu, or my committee chairperson, Dr. Lu, hlu@georgiasouthern.edu.

The survey is available through the following link
https://georgiasouthern.us2.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8r0mSWwiYWcmTCR.

By completing the survey, the participant agrees to the informed consent.

Thank you for your assistance.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number **H13245.**

Title of Project: Elementary Principals' Leadership Practices As Perceived By Teachers During Response To Intervention (RTI) Implementation

Principal Investigator: Oatanisha Dawson, 912.261.2161, 571 Freedom Trail, Brunswick, GA. 31525, od00061@georgiasouthern.edu .

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Hsu-Lien Lu, Department of Teaching and Learning, COE, Georgia Southern University, Room 4113, 237 Forest Drive, Statesboro, GA 30458, 912-478-0210 , hlu@georgiasouthern.edu)

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

_Oatanisha Dawson_____ ___January 23, 2013_____
Investigator Signature Date

APPENDIX K
DEMOGRAPHICS SECTION OF SURVEY

1. Position held
   - General Education Teacher
   - Special Education Teacher
   - Counselor
   - Psychologist
   - Other Position (i.e., English Language Specialist, Instructional Specialist, Resource/ Support)

2. Number of years teaching
   - One or Less - Novice
   - 2 – 5 years - Beginning
   - 6 – 9 years - Experienced
   - 10 – 14 years - Veteran
   - 15 – 24 years - Expert
   - 25 or more years

3. Number of years in current school
   - One or Less
   - 2 – 5 years
   - 6 – 9 years
   - 10 – 14 years
   - 15 – 24 years
   - 25 or more years

4.Highest degree earned
   - Bachelor's
   - Master's
   - Specialist's
   - Doctoral

5.Title I School
   - Yes
   - No

6. Grade level taught
   - K-1
   - 2-3
   - 4-5
   - All of the above

7. Who is in charge of RTI implementation in your building?
   - Principal
   - Assistant Principal
   - Special Education Teacher
   - Psychologist
   - Counselor
   - Intervention Specialist
   - Other *(i.e., District level personnel, etc.)*

8. How often do you have RTI related

experiences with your principal?
   - Less than once a month
   - Once a month
   - 2-3 times a month
   - Once a week
   - 2-3 times a week
   - Daily

9.Age
   - 18-24 years
   - 25-34 years
   - 35-44 years
   - 45-54 years
   - 55 and older

10. Gender
   - Male
   - Female